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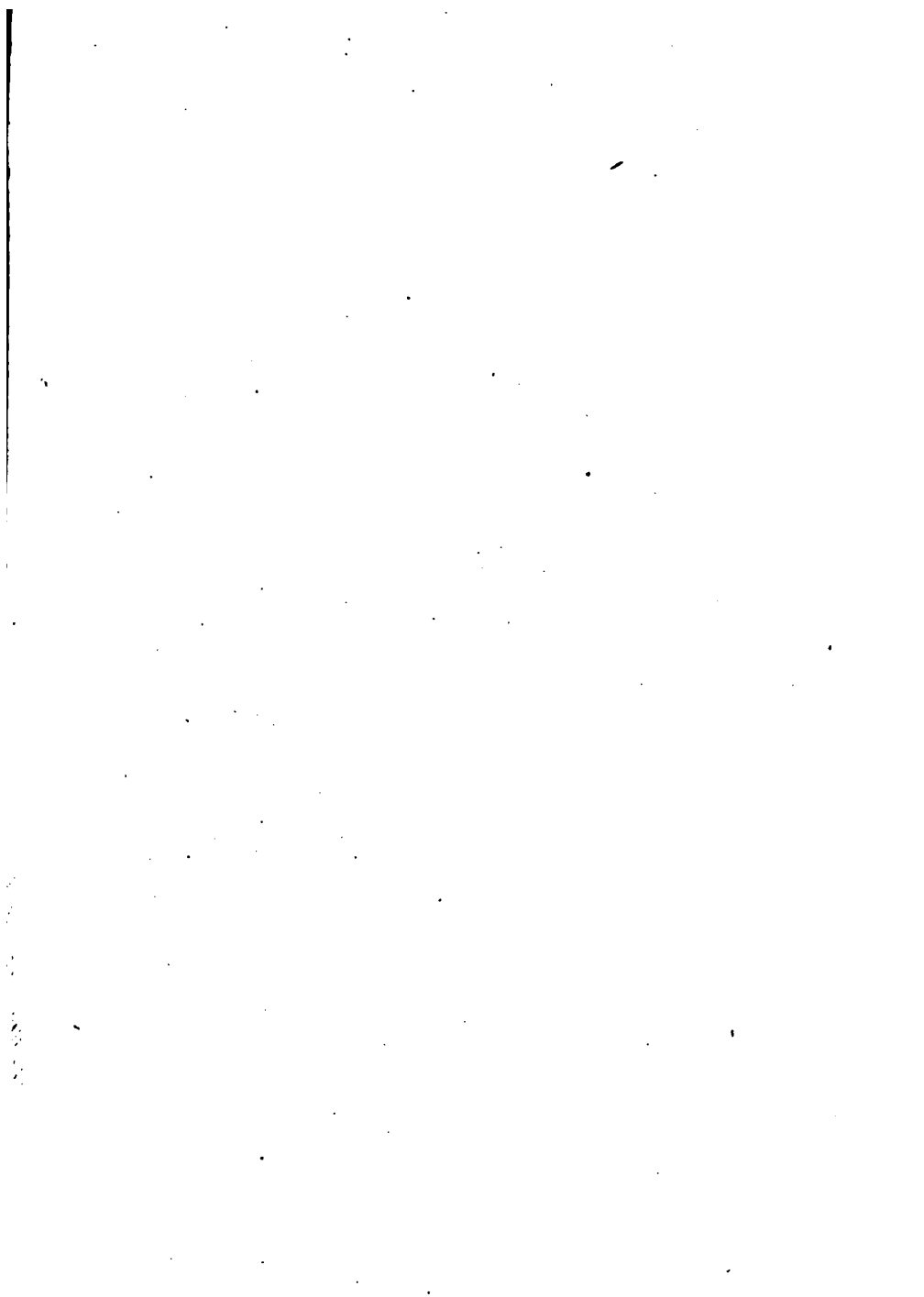
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MINNIE'S LOVE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"A TRAP TO CATCH A SUNBEAM,"

"THE DREAM CHINTZ,"

"THE CLOUD WITH THE SILVER LINING,"

ETC.



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MINNIE'S LOVE

CHAP. I.

The Young Wife.

“WELL, that is the dullest newspaper I ever read; nothing at all in it — nothing.”

And the speaker flung the paper on to the table, and himself back in his chair; and yawned, and pushed his fingers through his hair, and rolled over with his foot a little skye who lay curled up on the rug; and then jumping out of his seat, he said:

“Minnie, say something; tell me something; for I feel most horribly bored, and have not the remotest idea what to do with myself.”

The person addressed looked up from her work, and smiled very sweetly as she answered him,—

“Dear Edward, I don’t know anything to tell you.”

“Don’t you? Well, if this everlasting rain would give over, I’d go out; but it’s such a bore getting wet; and cabbing it, as I’ve done this week, diminishes the exchequer. I want to look up Stamford about those railway shares; perhaps I might get there between the drops.”

And he sauntered to the window, and looked out. A rather hopeless look-out it was, too—rain, pouring rain—a few drenched women slopping along under dripping umbrellas; a few faces at the opposite windows, gazing out at the weather as he himself was doing; a cab or two, the horses shining with wet, and a little stream pouring down off the drivers’ hats, and dropping pleasantly on to their knees—was all that was to be seen. No break in the leaden sky gave

the faintest hope of a termination to the "everlasting rain."

"Well, I think I shall go, Minnie, just as far as Stamford's," at length he said.

"Very well, dear; will you be home to luncheon?"

"I don't know; don't wait — bye, bye!" And he sauntered listlessly out of the room, banging the door behind him; but instantly re-opening it, he said, "If I bring any fellows in to dinner, you've got enough, I suppose."

"Oh, yes! I hope so; I should think so."

"All right! Bye-bye!"

"You never kissed me, Edward."

"Oh! is that necessary?"

"I think so!"

He came in again, walked up to her, and, lifting up her chin, gazed into as sweet a face as ever graced a home; and, parting back the long masses of wavy golden hair, so wilful that it refused to be kept in its place by any comb or pin, he kissed the fair, white

forehead and the rosy lips very tenderly.

"Good bye, little woman! Take care of yourself!"

"I'll try; but I scarcely know how," she answered, smiling.

"That's true enough! Well, I'm off!"

And so he started for his walk; and Minnie continued working, the smile still resting on her lips, which her husband's kiss had summoned there. And then, after a time, she threw her work aside, and sauntered to the window, too; and gazed out into the dreary-looking street, and wished it would leave off raining; for she scarcely knew how to employ herself till dinner, and Edward's return. It always seemed so dreary when he was out; but she had not liked to tell him so, for her mother had told her to be very careful not to make herself a burden to her husband.

Her mother! Some of the rain-drops seemed to have fallen into Minnie's eyes as this thought

crossed her mind — that gentle, tender, loving mother, so far away, and alone. She was a widow, and all her children were married. Minnie had been the last bird to leave the nest. She had pleaded, and Edward had kindly and warmly seconded her, that her mother should come and live with them ; but she had said,— “No, my children ; young people are best alone. Go, and be all in all to each other, as you should ; make a new home for yourselves, and let me remain in mine—it has been a very happy one to me ; and though those who have made it so dear, are gone, everything about it speaks of them to me ; and memory will help me to fill again each room with the dear faces. And you will come with your little ones to see me very often, all of you. It is better so, believe me, Minnie.”

And so Minnie had tried to think ; but the best proof she could give her husband of her love was leaving that sweet, good, wise mother for him.

They had been married six months, and as yet she had had no cause to regret her decision in his favour; for he was most kind and loving, and the young wife was very happy. She had never lived in London before, never visited it but once. Edward had met her whilst on a visit to his uncle, who was the rector of the little country-village in which she had been born and bred.

Minnie's father had been a clergyman also; and the widowed mother with her little family had lived since her husband's death with great economy on a small income settled on her at her marriage.

Her daughters had married well, and her sons were fortunate in obtaining good situations; and now, the only one left at home was pretty little Minnie—her youngest, and, perhaps it may be owned, her darling; but, at a dinner party given at the rectory, the mother saw the first symptoms that she should be compelled to resign this child, too.

The fresh, unhackneyed, pretty country girl made an instantaneous impression on young Woodford's heart. He had often been advised to marry, for he had an independent income, and was perfectly able to keep a wife; but he had never seen any one he could fancy before.

At the balls, dinners, races, fêtes, which he was constantly frequenting, he saw plenty of girls, but they never suggested themselves to him as wives—they were delightful to look at, to flirt with, to dance with; all the amusements would be utterly flat and dull without them; but none had ever struck him as a being whom he should like to be always with, whom, in his moments of weariness or worry, he could come home to for comfort, who would love him alike in sunshine and in storm.

Edward Woodford had a very good notion of a wife's duties, he thought very strongly on the subject. I do not know if he had considered the husband's duties quite so seriously; whether

it had ever occurred to him that in the same measure as he expected forbearance, gentleness, cheerfulness, love, devotion, from his wife, she would require the like from him ; at any rate, he was seeking one in whom such virtues existed, and found them, as he thought, where he least expected them, in the person of the "little beauty of Grassdale," as Minnie Foster was universally called.

Woodford had voted a visit to his uncle the greatest bore imaginable; for he disliked the country, as many young men do who have been born and bred in London. To him there was nothing like London society—London amusements—London conveniences.

He could not imagine what any one could possibly find to do in the country ; but he went to please his mother, for he possessed that best guarantee for making a good husband—he was a good son ; indeed, a far better son than his mother deserved. She was a worldly, cold-

hearted, selfish woman; she wished him to visit his uncle, because she had no wish to offend the old man—whose well-kept house and liberal purse she found, often, very useful. He liked to see his nephews once or twice a-year, and she told them it was right to show a proper respect to the old man's age and position.

Edward had had a godfather, unheard of, I believe, before, save in fairy lore, who had left him a fortune; but her second son was unprovided for, and the rector was childless, and had good private means beside his living—decidedly not an uncle to offend, and so, when he wrote to say he had some friends come to stay with him, and he wanted some young people to make it cheerful—young men especially—and therefore he hoped the two boys would spare him a day or two, Mrs. Woodford said:—

“Go, by all means—your poor dear uncle is getting old, it is right to give him all the

pleasure you can. He may not be long with us, poor dear; you agree with me, Robert, do you not?"

Robert, being her husband, agreed with her directly; he had made a point of doing so ever since they had been married; so "the boys" went down—Fred getting leave from his employers for a day or two; and there, as I said, Edward first saw his wife. But the same wife has been all this time looking out of window, feeling a little dull, thinking of her mother—thinking, too, how right her mother was, when she said that the first year of married life was not so very bright as some would picture it. She could seem to hear her mother's voice as she sat the night before her marriage-day, holding her two hands in both of hers, saying:

"Do not be disheartened, if there are many days in your first year of marriage which seem dark and dreary; it is by no means the happiest year—you have each other's tempers

and ways to learn and understand, and you will make many mistakes which, like striking a wrong note, will cause a discord in the harmony. Only learn not to strike that chord again, and the melody will flow on as before. Then it must needs be, that many times your husband will be out without you, he will soon fall into his old ways, and find it possible to leave you—to live without seeing you for many hours; those hours will be very long, and very dreary, but only, my child, beware of letting him think you found them so. Let no tearful, cloudy face greet him on his return; show him that the hours have been occupied in something done for him, and that the sound of his voice and footstep has clothed your face with one glad smile of joyous welcome, which, in all his future absences, will be a tender memory to draw him home when nothing else would;” and then, too, she remembered how her mother said the second year would be so much brighter, because in those hours she might not be alone;

and a flush of pleasure mounted to her cheek as that sweet thought stole into her heart, and she saw, in fancy, the cherub face and rosy fat fingers of a little one who would call her Mother!

CHAP. II.

Phæbe and Robin.

MINNIE'S reveries were disturbed by a knock at the door, and the entrance of her maid; for Minnie kept this encumbrance by her husband's express wish; though poor little innocent Minnie thought her a great nuisance, never having been used to one in her life before. But, personally, Minnie liked her very much, for she was a quiet, kind, sensible person; and could she have found sufficient employment for her, she would not have minded her being in the house.

"What is it, Watson?" she asked. "You never want me to try that dress on again, do you?"

"Oh no, ma'am!" answered the maid,

smiling. "I think the lace sits quite nicely now, and I need not trouble you any more; but I thought it better to tell you, that Phœbe is crying so very much, she can scarcely get on with her work. I have asked her what is the matter, but I cannot get her to tell me."

"Poor girl! I'll come and see her. Where is she?"

"She was trying to dust your room, ma'am; but the tears were running so fast down her cheeks, she could scarcely see. Shall I send her to you, ma'am?"

"I had better go to her, Watson. I think you would have a difficulty in persuading her to come to me in a weeping state."

And so Minnie went to seek her in her own room.

Phœbe was a very pretty girl, whom Minnie had brought with her from her country home. Her mother was afraid it was a dangerous experiment; but Minnie had said, with tears in her eyes, that it would be so nice to have

one home-face with her, so Mrs. Foster said no more, and the girl's mother being quite willing she should go, it was arranged that Phœbe was to be engaged as housemaid, and go to London with the bride. From that moment she became an object of envy to half the girls in the village; and all sorts of prophecies of evil, which were to follow Phœbe's taking service in London, were eagerly circulated. But Phœbe, nothing alarmed at all these warnings, was determined to go. She loved Mrs. and Miss Foster dearly. She had known them ever since she had first toddled to the infant school, and she was sure she should be as safe as with her own mother; and so her pretty face lost none of its smiling satisfaction, until she found that some one besides the silly malicious girls thought ill of her new service, and wished her not to go.

This some one was a wheelwright in the village, a man some eight or ten years older than Phœbe, but whom the little blooming

village maiden seemed to prefer to all the younger men who offered her attention. And yet he had never spoken of love to her; only never a Sunday evening passed but he strolled home from church by her side, and spent an hour or two at her mother's cottage; and never did she express a wish to possess anything, but so sure was Robin Dale to bring it. He was always showing kind attentions to her father and mother, too, and her little brothers and sisters; and, in short, there was no one whose good opinion Phœbe so much coveted as Robin Dale's.

You will wonder, perhaps, how she could be so anxious to leave the village where he lived. Why, because she had heard him say, how foolish girls were to be idling their time at home. How much wiser it would be if they went out in the world, and worked well and hard when they were young, and then came back to settle in their own early homes, if they liked.

Eagerly, therefore, did poor little Phœbe accept Miss Foster's offer to go with her when she married, the bright future shining so as to eclipse the gloomy present—that future *he* had talked of, “coming back to settle in her early home.”

But the night before her departure, as she came home from several farewell-visits to her old friends and companions—her way leading homewards across some fields, and through a narrow lane, so narrow that the carts of corn might leave pieces of their golden burden on either hedge, and the trees were compelled to lace their branches together, for they had no room to grow any other way—her homeward path leading, as I have said, through this lane, she strolled slowly and thoughtfully along it; and, presently, hearing a footstep behind, she turned, and saw Robin Dale: he quickened his pace, and came up with her.

“So you go to-morrow, Phœbe,” he began, directly.

"Yes," she said, softly; and she dropped her head, and something very like a dew-drop trembled amongst the leaves of the flower she held.

"What's made ye think o' going to such a place as London, I know not; you're tired of our homely ways and rough clothes, I suppose, and want to be amongst the folks who are clothed in fine linen, and fare sumptuously every day; to see they fine gentlemen, with their powdered hair and gold lace, with their idle hands white like a lady's, till you learn to despise and look down on the hard brown hand that honestly earns its daily bread, and the clean gabardine of the simple country folk you're leaving behind."

Robin spoke very bitterly, — so bitterly and harshly, as it seemed to Phoebe, that, expecting as she did, only praise from him, mingled feelings of surprise, disappointment, and indignation, quite overpowered her, and she could scarcely find voice to answer him; but, sum-

moning all her courage, she said, raising her tearful, flushed face to his—

“ I have done what I thought right, what my mother thought right, and it is too late to alter now, even if I would ; those who think I’ve a bad meaning for going, must think so, if they will ; so, good night, Robin, — good bye ;” and poor Phœbe, whose full heart would fain have expended itself in a burst of eloquence, could get no further.

“ Good bye, Phœbe,” answered Robin, “ if you must go ; and may God’s blessing go with you, and keep you from harm ; it’s an evil place you’re going to, full of temptation ; you need to pray for help to keep you safe—don’t forget us all !”

Phœbe’s voice was quite gone now ; she could make no answer, but she held out her hand timidly, as though she was not quite sure it would be taken—it was taken, and held for a moment in Robin’s two large ones ; they were both silent, so silent that the “ beating of their

own hearts was all the sound they heard;" and then Phoebe drew her hand away, and, once more murmuring "Good bye," ran off home, never turning her head once, or she would have seen that Robin stood watching her out of sight.

The next day she started for London, and no tidings of Robin had she heard, save in her mother's letters, in which she always said, "Robin and all friends were well," until that morning, and the reason of her bitter tears she could not tell her mistress or any one—for how could she say that she was breaking her heart for a man who had never said he loved her. Poor little Phoebe, that morning's letter had been like a death-blow; it told her Robin Dale was going to be married!

Her mistress was very kind to her, and advised her to go and lie down; but she said, "No, she would rather work about;" and in the hope of finding the cause for her tears Minnie said:

“Are you pining to go home again, Phœbe ; because I will try and find another servant, if you are?”

Phœbe replied, eagerly :

“Oh ! no, no, please let me stay, Ma’am ; I would not go home, indeed !”

And so Minnie left her to herself, trusting that there was nothing much the matter, and that the bright little maid, who was a great favourite with her, would soon be happy and cheerful again. If she had been pining to return home, Minnie could quite have sympathised with her, for she began to yearn for the sweet country life she had always been used to.

London had amused her for a week or two ; but, as the bright sun grew daily more powerful, she sighed for the shade of the trees, and the murmur of the little stream which ran through the village, and the songs of the birds, and the smell of the new-mown hay, with a longing which she could not control. When she was

alone she would sit and dream over again those happy days when she first knew Edward, those wanderings with him in the sweet summer evenings, when all was so still and lovely, and they were so happy — too happy to talk. On one of those sweet evenings he had given her a moss rose—and, ever since, the scent of roses vividly recalled that evening; and she loved them for its sake.

Edward was constantly telling her, that when the season came, it would be so gay and beautiful in London, that she would like it so much better, but she doubted it: and, as the days went by, and Edward was out more, she thought how nice it would be, if they could be again in the country, near dear mamma, amongst the old friends she had known all her life, for she did feel so lonely, and such thoughts as these occupied her till dressing time.

CHAP. III.

Old Friends.

EDWARD had not returned to luncheon, and Minnie was just going up stairs, when she heard his knock at the door, and, on its being opened, his voice in conversation with some one else; and, for the first time, it occurred to her, she had never made any further arrangement about the dinner. in case of his bringing home a friend. What was to be done? She could not pass them on the stairs; she must wait till they came up, — and every moment was precious, if anything had to be cooked. But there was no help for it; and she consoled herself with hoping there would be enough, and the satisfaction of remembering there was a pastry-cook's very near if there was not sufficient; and then her

husband came clattering up-stairs, followed by a young and very handsome man, whom he introduced to her as Frank Ferrars.

"Will you give him some dinner, Minnie; I fell on him quite by accident, and I've felt better ever since; you know him very well by name, don't you, dear?"

"O yes! I have often heard Edward speak of you," and Minnie timidly held out her hand to him.

Mr. Ferrars then apologised for his intrusion, but said she must blame her husband, who insisted on it; he spoke with a very sweet, low voice, but in a rather hesitating manner, from seemingly slight nervousness with strangers.

"Yes, I insisted on his coming, Minnie," continued her husband; "for I wanted you to know him; he's the oldest friend I have got in the world! Now, old fellow, amuse yourself with some books while we go and adorn, come, Minnie."

Minnie, the moment the door closed, ran

down into the dining-room, to have an interview with the cook respecting the dinner, who, seeming very much to dislike the idea of having anything more to cook at the eleventh hour, said there was plenty; and poor little Minnie, who knew very little about housekeeping, and trusted such matters to the cook, who was recommended to her as "a treasure," went upstairs to dress, quite satisfied that all would be right: and the first cross look she had had from her husband, was that which greeted her when they sat down to dinner without fish or soup. It quite spoiled Minnie's appetite, that angry glance and the speech which followed:

"Ferrars, I am sorry you are so badly treated; next time you come to see us, I'll order the dinner myself."

Poor Minnie felt foolishly inclined to cry, but she said nothing; and the conversation was dexterously turned by their guest, who saw the cloud on the husband's brow; but his old reminiscences of school days soon cleared it. The

dinner passed off without further misadventure; and Minnie escaped, as quickly as she could, into the drawing-room; and then the two friends drew their chairs closer together, and talked on, forgetful of the time, forgetful of Minnie and her summons to tea, living over again their early days.

“What became of Denman, Ferrars; I've heard nothing of him for years? He went up to the University, didn't he?” asked Woodford, filling his glass and passing the wine to his friend.

“Yes, he went to Oxford—but, I'm sorry to say, did not come to much good.”

“I'm not astonished at that; he was very soft, but very good-natured.”

“Yes, good-natured to a fault; he could refuse no one anything. The last I heard of him, I fear he was going to the bad altogether.”

“And Harrowby, what of him? I met him last season at the opera, with an uncommonly pretty girl on his arm.”

Ferrars looked straight into his glass, and the palest possible flush mounted to his face, as he answered, shortly :

“ His sister ! ”

“ Oh ! was it ?—well, he seemed very attentive ; I thought it was a case. He’s taken orders, hasn’t he ? ”

“ Yes, I believe so ; but his powers would not be very great, I should imagine, in the preaching line,” answered Ferrars.

“ No, distinctly not ; but now old fellow tell me about all your own people, the old folks, and your sisters, and all the jolly girls that you used to know. I’m sure we have passed some very merry days at Moorlands.”

“ Well, the old folks, as you irreverently call them,” said Ferrars, smiling with his eyes as it were, in a manner peculiar to him, “ are wonderfully blooming, my mother quite juvenile, my sisters flourishing, and as for all the ‘ jolly girls,’ well, I can hardly tell you : some, like Box and Cox, are married and settled, others have left

the village, and one, whom you perhaps remember the best of all, Agnes Hay, is an orphan, poor girl, and has been adopted by old Mrs. Crawford, whom I dare say you also recollect."

"Oh ! yes, very well," said Woodford ; bursting into a hearty laugh, "the party with the turban, whom your mother victimised me into taking down to dinner, after she'd heard me say, too, that I always had to take a turban down to dinner, and that it was my abhorrence. Oh ! don't I remember her ! Deaf she was with one ear, and as ill-luck would have it, the one next to me ; so that every time I ventured a remark, I was compelled to utter it loud enough for all the table to hear, and there was invariably a dead silence just as I had to bawl out some of the stupid common-places which pass between strangers."

"Yes, I remember ; well, poor Agnes is condemned to live always with your turbaned friend ; but, poor girl, it is better than joining the endless herd of governesses ; and I believe she is very happy."

"She was so cheerful always. But not pretty, I think; at least she never struck me so—I've heard men call her pretty, though."

"Nice-looking, is the term, I should think best applied to her," said Ferrars, "and in her deep mourning she used to look very interesting. But are we not keeping Mrs. Woodford an unconscionably long time alone?"

"I suppose we ought to join her now; but you'll have a glass of sherry, won't you? What do you think of this port?"

"Undeniable."

"I thought it was your tap, by what I remember of you in those golden days at Trinity."

"Golden days! You a married man!" said Ferrars.

"Well, to tell you the truth, old fellow, though it is treason, I declare that time was, and ever will be, the happiest time of my life, nothing can come up to the delight of college days, I've got nothing to do now."

"Because you live in London. Why not take a house in the country?"

"My dear fellow, worse still; you hav'nt even got society there."

"Why, you have just said you were very merry at Moorlands."

"Well you are particularly fortunate there, I own, and your family are society in themselves; but you confess yourself that you are reduced now to Mrs. Crawford and Agnes Hay."

"By no means: I only name those whom you remember; there are some capital families about, and we have archery parties, boating excursions, and a variety of dissipation, I assure you. Why, now, cannot you and Mrs. Woodford give us a few days, I am sure my mother would be delighted to see you; I am going back the day after to-morrow, and would let you know when she could receive you."

"Well, we'll talk to Minnie about it."

"We must first make our peace for our long absence from her, I think;" said Ferrars.

"Oh! that 'll be all right, come along."

And, rising, the gentlemen went up stairs to the drawing-room.

Minnie was singing when they entered. She had made up her mind, though vexed at her husband's speech at dinner, not to revert to it again unless he did. And as she found, that while sitting alone she began again her old dreams of home and the country, she thought it better to fly to her piano and sing away all gloomy thoughts and evil tempers, which she often did. She had a lovely voice and great taste, and a great love for music, and, all her life through, it had been her resource when worried or unhappy. She rose directly the gentlemen entered.

"Your tea is quite cold, I fear," she said, drawing her chair to the table and commencing to pour the tea out.

"Then we shall be as badly off as we were at dinner," said her husband. "Never mind, better luck next time."

This was a most unfortunate speech ; all the forgotten irritation which the music had charmed away, returned. And Minnie's face crimsoned and her hand shook as she lifted the tea-pot, so much that Ferrars, perceiving it, sat down beside her, and said, in his kind winning voice :

" Let me pour that out : it is too heavy for you ; you know bachelors are accustomed to pour out tea."

Minnie gladly gave up the task. And Ferrars began to ask her if she would not come with her husband for a few days to Moorlands.

" I should like it very much," she answered gently. " Anywhere in the country ; but my husband, unhappily, prefers London, and would scarcely like leaving it in the season."

" What are you taking my name in vain about ? " said Woodford.

" We are endeavouring to arrange about a visit to Moorlands : your wife will come if you will."

"All right, I'll go, I'm sure. And perhaps Minnie will take a lesson in housekeeping from your mother : I remember she was first-rate in that line."

Poor Minnie! Again the red angry flush mounted to her face, but she made no answer. And Ferrara, with his usual readiness, again changed the conversation ; and presently Edward rose and laying his hand on his wife's shoulder, said,

"Sing to us, old girl, will you ? "

Minnie's impulse was to say "No ;" but she remembered that they were not alone, that it would look like temper, and to show that would be a breach of good taste before their guest ; and so restraining with an effort the tears which were ready to rush into her eyes, she went at once to the piano and began to sing. But who can sing with tears in their thoughts even? Poor Minnie broke down, she had never sung so badly ; of course Edward told her so, and it ended in Minnie escaping to her own

room to weep over this first misunderstanding with her husband, where he, after some time, came to seek her, and was beyond measure astonished to find her in tears. He soon drew from her a confession of the cause; and poor little Minnie was almost glad that Edward had been unkind and made her cry; for the loving words and tender endearments were so sweet, that they were worth all the pain of the last few moments. He said, "Now bathe those pretty eyes, Pet, and come down as soon as you can; I will run down and tell Ferrars you did not feel quite well, no more you did, when you thought your husband was angry with you, did you, darling? But you must not be so sensitive really," and kissing her fondly again, he ran down stairs to join his friend, and account for his wife's absence.

Minnie soon returned to the room, and Ferrars shortly after took his leave, and the unpleasant subject was no more mentioned between them.

CHAP. IV.

A Party.

THE next morning the weather was lovely; all the clouds had vanished and nothing remained, to tell of the past heavy rain, but the muddy crossings. Edward tempted Minnie out to make some morning calls, and the day passed very happily; but in the evening, Minnie had to undergo the ordeal of a large party at some friends of her husband's, and strangers to her, which she had been dreading ever since the invitation; but Edward's burst of admiration at her appearance, when she entered the room, dressed to go, somewhat consoled her, she so loved to please him, his praise was so dear to her, and the words—

“There will be no one in the room to equal

my wife, how proud I shall be of her!" reconciled her even to that, to her, awful infliction—an evening party.

It was a brilliant affair. An assemblage of elegant beautiful women, clever men, first-rate artists, and fine music, superb flowers, and in short everything which could please the eye and ear, so that Minnie even could not deny that it was all very beautiful; but, knowing no one, when Edward deposited her on a couch and left her, she could not help wishing herself at home, and thinking how much more she had many a time enjoyed a syllabub party, in the meadow of the vicarage, at her own dear old home.

Presently, her attention was attracted by the entrance of a lady attired in a green velvet dress, with a gorgeous turban of red and gold, accompanied by a young girl, so simply and quietly dressed, that the contrast with her companion rendered it impossible for the couple to escape observation. Save this

contrast in their dress, there was nothing very remarkable about either of them. The young girl was by no means beautiful, there were many in the room far more lovely, but when she was spoken to, her face lighted up so wonderfully, and her movements were so gentle and graceful, that Minnie felt singularly interested in her, and could not help noticing her; her dress was white silk, perfectly plain, but the body trimmed with some fine old point lace; in her hair were some real white lilies; and, clasping a piece of black velvet round her throat, was a small antique brooch, the only ornament she wore. The lady with her glittered with jewels; and the rich velvet dress she wore had a flounce to the knees of point lace. About her shoulders she had an Indian scarf of beautiful workmanship; and in her hand she carried a feather fan, with a jewelled handle. They had not been in the room long, before they were surrounded with gentlemen; every one seemed to know the old lady, and

to like to talk to the young one. Minnie's curiosity was greatly excited, to know who they could be; and at last she managed to catch her husband's eye across the room, and signing him to come to her, she eagerly asked him if he could gratify her curiosity respecting the new arrivals.

"I know their faces perfectly well," he said; but I cannot at this moment tell you who they are. Yes! I can," he said suddenly, "it's Mrs. Crawford and Agnes Hay, I declare; friends of Ferrars," he exclaimed; "they live down at his home. I'll go and speak to them and introduce you, shall I?"

"Yes, do; I should like to speak to that nice girl so much." So Woodford made his way through the people, and made a polite bow to the old lady. She at first did not recollect him; but, on mentioning his name, and his friend Ferrars, she said at once:

"Oh! yes, certainly! Dear me! of course. Agnes, my love, you remember Mr. Woodford,

dining with him, and meeting him several times at Moorlands."

"Oh! yes."

A flush covered the young girl's face, as she turned quickly from the group of men she was talking to, and returned Woodford's bow.

"My wife is here, Mrs. Crawford," he said; "will you allow me to present her to you?"

"Your sister. Oh! certainly."

"My wife," Woodford repeated louder.

"I beg your pardon; certainly, I should be delighted to make her acquaintance," and so in another moment or two, Minnie was seated on the same ottoman with Mrs. Crawford, submitting to a severe scrutiny from her bead-like black eyes; for all the time she conversed with her, Minnie could see she was examining her from head to foot, and that not an article of her dress was passed over.

"My dear Agnes," she said, tapping her arm with her fan; "this is Mrs. Woodford,—my adopted daughter, Miss Hay." The ladies

bowed, and Agnes gave Minnie, so sweet a smile, that the good impression she had first made was fully confirmed, and she was exceedingly glad when Mrs. Crawford, seeing some one else she wished to speak to, went away, leaving her with Agnes, who began at once to talk to her, as though they had been acquainted all their lives. She told her that Mrs. Crawford always came to London in the season; but this was the first time she had come with her.

"I have only lived with her two years; and last season I was in mourning, and not inclined for gaiety."

"Do you like a London life?" asked Minnie.

"Oh! no, not for always; but I have been very much amused; I like the Theatres very much, and I think a visit to town very agreeable; but I would rather live in the country, the parties are exactly alike, all of them."

"So I think," said Minnie; "and painfully dull."

"That greatly depends on whether you know people, I think. Look at your husband for instance; he does not look dull," said Agnes, smiling, as she directed Minnie's attention to her husband, who was laughing immoderately with a tall strange-looking man, in spectacles, who was leaning against the folding door.

"No: he seems greatly amused certainly; do you know who he is talking to?"

"Yes, I know him, because I see him everywhere, but at this moment I can't remember his name; he's a great wit, or thinks himself so. People seem to make a point of laughing at him; but the remarks, I heard him make at a dinner party the other night, seemed to me more personal and ill-natured than witty or amusing; but that may be my stupidity. I am not accustomed to wits; and perhaps do not understand them, though we have a few strange characters in our part of the world too."

"Oh! yes," said Minnie, "I have enjoyed

many a hearty laugh in the country; there is a great deal of genuine humour amongst the poor."

"Yes; I could introduce you to one delightful old fellow," answered Agnes; "if you were to visit our neighbourhood."

"I hope to do so, next week; I believe we are going to Moorlands, for a day or two."

"Some one is going to sing," said Agnes, rather hurriedly, and the conversation ceased; and, at the conclusion of the song, Woodford came to introduce some other friend he had found to Minnie, and she and Agnes had but little opportunity for conversation, during the rest of the evening; but she saw her husband talking very much to her. As they drove home, Edward asked her what she thought of Agnes Hay.

"Oh! I like her so much, I took a strange fancy to her directly I saw her."

"She is charming," he said; "I used to wonder, when I was at Moorlands, how the

men could call her pretty, and run after her as they did; but to-night I can quite understand it. She is better than pretty; everything she talks of makes the expression of her face change. She looks so roguish and full of fun one moment, and the next her eyes flash fire, or seem liquid with tears of feeling; it is quite singular to talk to her. I never saw a woman like her before."

"I'm so glad you think so, Edward, darling; for I'm quite delighted with her, and shall so like to cultivate her acquaintance."

"So you shall, Pet: we'll ask her to stay with us, if you like."

"Yes; when we know her better, we will."

"And what did you think of the party altogether?"

"Oh! so stupid, dear. I wish you would be a dear darling hubby, and never take me to one again."

"Bless me! no. If that is to constitute a dear darling hubby, I shall never be one; in

the first place, I am very proud of my beautiful wife, and like to show her about ; and, secondly, I consider it a duty to keep up our acquaintance. If we never visit any one, they will not visit us, and we shall have no society at all."

"I never want any society, but yours."

"My dear child, if we never saw anything but one another, we should be so heartily sick of each other, we should quarrel like cat and dog, and be like the man in the play—who after being shut up, with his wife for a month, vowed, he should be delighted to see even his bitterest enemy. So make up your mind, little woman, to a lot more parties, and, more than that, a dinner party at home, in a week or two."

"Oh ! Edward, that is fearful to think of. It must be after our visit to Moorlands, then, I am sure."

"Oh ! yes," answered her husband, laughing, "after your instruction in the noble art of house-keeping. Poor little puss, I was cross,

then, wasn't I? Never mind, we'll concoct a stunning good dinner between us; and ask some nice people to come and eat it; and, depend on it, it will go off capitally, it's rather a hobby of mine. I've a great notion about giving dinners; doing the thing well you know. But here we are at home."

Minnie found Phœbe sitting up for her, for Watson had gone to bed with a bad headache.

Poor Phœbe had striven heroically with her grief, and managed to keep about her work and neglect nothing; but heavy at her heart lay the thought, that Robin Dale was going to be married, that never was that happy dream to be realized she had pictured to herself when she should be Robin's wife. Many and many a time had she looked into the windows of his cottage, round which the jasmine clustered and dreamed of a time when she should look out amongst these blossoms the happy little mistress of it all. Many a time when she had seen him walking up and down his garden alone, she had

dreamed that one day her little arm would be linked in his, and he would never be lonely again. And now it was all over; some one would walk in that garden, and share his loneliness, and gaze from out those jasmine-covered windows, but it would not be her; and as she had sat up alone waiting for her mistress, she had thought all this over again, and wept bitterly.

Minnie saw that her eyes were swollen with crying, and so she said gently to her,

"Phœbe, I am grieved to see you have been fretting again, I wish you would tell me the cause of your sorrow; I should so like to comfort you if I could."

The kind tone and words caused the tears to flow afresh, and Phœbe murmured through her sobs.

"No one *can* comfort me."

"Well, I really cannot bear to see you cry," said Minnie; "and if I cannot serve you in any way or comfort you, you had better go to

bed ; but indeed, Phœbe, unless I understand the cause of your tears, or you manage to conceal them from me, you and I must part ; for people will think I beat you, Phœbe," she continued, smiling. " But now run away to bed, and let me see you with your old smiling face in the morning ; for your tears will not let you see to be much assistance to me ; so good night."

" Good night, ma'am," answered poor weeping Phœbe, too sorrowful to attempt to resist her mistress's commands, too sorrowful to care what became of her, so that she did not go home to see Robin wedded to another ; and she crept up stairs to her room, and laid her pretty tear-stained face upon her pillow and cried herself to sleep.

CHAP. V.

Moorlands.

IN a few days came a letter from Ferrars, saying that his mother would be delighted to receive Mr. and Mrs. Woodford as soon as they liked, they had only to name the day and hour, and the carriage should meet them at the station.

Delighted at the thoughts of being once more in the country, Minnie eagerly begged her husband to accept the invitation ; and accordingly a day or two after the receipt of the letter, Minnie found herself again amongst the sights and sounds which were to her, second nature, and for which she had so pined.

Moorlands was a lovely place: a fine old rambling house, surrounded by park-like

meadows, through which ran an excellent trout stream. The garden, on which much pains was bestowed, was very lovely; and when, the morning after her arrival, Minnie threw open her window, she could have screamed with child-like delight at the prospect before her. Edward came in from his dressing-room as she stood there, and remained looking at her for some time without her seeing him, and then he stole near her, and put his arm round her. She started slightly, but knowing it was he, she said, without moving her glad earnest gaze from the open window,

“Oh, dear Edward! is not this beautiful.”

“This is,” he said, touching her cheek; “you have not looked so well since we’ve been married. Have these green trees and meadows such an effect on you, darling?”

“They have indeed; it seems like new life to me, dearest husband,” she said, laying her head, with its wealth of golden hair, on his shoulder. “I would live with you anywhere,

in a desert if need be, and be happy because I was with you; but if our home was a country one, it would make your little wife the happiest woman in the world."

"Well; I will make a bargain with you. It is worth a sacrifice to have you always look as you do now. If you will come back to town till the end of July, I will endeavour to get a house at Grassdale."

"What! to live in always?" said Minnie, raising her head quickly, and looking into her husband's face with glad surprise. "Near dear dear mamma, in my old home; you are not in earnest, Edward?"

"Indeed I am thoroughly; but you must do all the parties properly till the end of the season."

"Oh! that I promise. With the joyous prospect before me of a home in sweet Grassdale, I can stand any amount of dissipation."

The loud sound of the bell, which summoned the household to prayers, stopped their further

conversation, and they descended to the dining-room, where they found the family assembled.

Mrs. Ferrars was a stately lady of the old school, with a full sense of the dignity of her position as the wife of a county magistrate with a handsome income. She had four daughters, and the son whom I have already introduced to you; the education and care of these children had been her constant occupation and greatest delight; and four more perfectly well behaved young ladies it would have been difficult to find. Of the son I will speak more particularly, as he has to figure in our history prominently. They were fine, tall, pretty girls, with long fair ringlets; all speaking, thinking and looking alike; believing implicitly in their father and mother, and doubting the possibility of any one doing right who differed from them in the least.

There are few things, I think, more singular to watch than the diversities of character; and

few things more difficult than to describe a character, so that others may see it in the same light as we do ourselves; but I must try to make you understand young Ferrars, for, as I have before said, he will take a prominent part in our history. He, too, had been brought up in the belief of the infallibility of his parents, and, until his school-boy days, spoke, looked and thought like his sisters; but the stern discipline of a public school, and the after experiences of college life, had altered his thoughts and changed his views, taught him that beyond his home there was a world, in which there were people as good and worthy and anxious to do their duty as his parents, though of wholly different opinions; taught him, in short, to be liberal and tolerant; to believe that there is more good in the world than he had ever given it credit for; but, at the same time, to value that care and love in his childhood, which had been his shield in many an hour of temptation.

With almost every one Ferrars was a favourite. I say *almost*, because he had idiosyncrasies which clashed with and offended the prejudices of some persons, and by such he was disliked, and called dictatorial and haughty; and his manner might, under these circumstances, be called so: but it was only manner; those who had the happiness of an intimate acquaintance with him knew him to be as true as steel—the warmest, most faithful friend, with a heart alive to the sorrows and sufferings of others, and a ready and willing hand to help and relieve them; with a humble, teachable, childlike disposition, easily influenced and led by those he loved and who loved him. Amongst his peculiarities, and I will not deny he had many, was a dislike to any expression or demonstration of feeling, whether of admiration, affection, terror or surprise; nothing would sooner freeze him into a studied cold manner than a great evidence of any kind of emotion. He never, by any chance, used large expressions; and all

the various expressions "Bless my soul!" "Goodness gracious!" "Good heavens!" which are so general to denote surprise, he never made use of himself, nor could he tolerate them in others. Violent invectives, or, still less, enthusiastic admiration, he never gave way to. He had a strange power of saying the most severe things to a person whom he thought deserved it, without losing his own temper at all. And, as he had an equally strange, or rather uncommon virtue, that of forgiving from his heart any one who had ever injured or offended him, he never supposed for a moment that his severe reproof or harsh judgment would lose him a friend, or change for a moment the good feeling which had before subsisted.

With his mother he was a great favourite; but she could not remember that he had grown up to man's estate, and often provoked him with lengthy lectures and advice, which he felt neither inclined to listen to nor follow, but he never allowed himself to give her an angry

answer; for he knew she loved him dearly, and he loved her, so he would listen to all she had to say silently, and then stoop down and kiss her, and say—

“Dear mother, I’m a very naughty boy, am I not?”

“Very naughty; and you won’t mind a word I say, I know.”

“Well, suppose I take you for a drive, and we’ll change the subject.”

And thus the lectures generally terminated, I fear with no other result than this confession of his naughtiness on the part of the culprit.

Minnie felt rather awe-struck in the presence of the stately Mrs. Ferrars, and scarcely knew what to say to the four young ladies; but with their father she soon became on excellent terms. He was such an old friend of her husband’s to begin with, and his manner was so kind and gentle to women, devoid of anything which could be construed into flirting, that, with all right-minded women, he soon became a favourite.

Immediately after breakfast, Mrs. Ferrars disappeared to attend to that art of house-keeping which she was supposed to possess in perfection, and into the mysteries of which Minnie hoped to be initiated before she left; and she and the young ladies strolled out into the garden, while the gentlemen went to inspect the stables, and, it must be confessed, to smoke a cigar.

"Do you allow your husband to smoke?" asked Miss Ferrars. "I would not."

"Oh no, no more would I," chimed in the other three.

Minnie laughed softly as she answered,

"Would not allow him! When you are married you will find that the *allowing* is all on the other side; besides, why should not our husbands have their innocent amusement as well as we? My darling mother used to say, our crochet and worsted-work might as well be forbidden as their cigars."

"But, Mrs. Woodford," replied Miss Ferrars,

"smoking is so horridly unpleasant; our work can offend no one."

"My working would offend my husband; there is nothing he so much dislikes, as to see a woman at work. I never work in the evening."

"Dear me!" said all the young ladies, at once, "not work in the evening! What do you do?"

"Sing, and play, and talk, and draw, sometimes."

"And never work! Oh, we do such quantities of work in the evening. We are making a carpet for our church, which we will shew you when you go in; and we've worked a set of drawing-room chairs, for a cousin of ours who has just been married."

"You are industrious, indeed! I am afraid I cannot count industry amongst my virtues."

"Perhaps you are not very strong, we are. We get up early and garden till breakfast-

time. Dora is quite a florist and botanist; and Marian has a passion for music, she always practises for two hours before breakfast."

Minnie thought how thankful she was that she did not live with them, to be awakened by this inveterate musician; but of course she did not say so, and Miss Ferrars continued.

"Lucy's delight, is parish-work. She is devoted to the poor and church-matters. Mr. Evans calls her his second curate."

"Then you have all your different occupations; I am afraid you will think me sadly lazy, I really do nothing; I was the youngest at-home and my darling mother spoilt me, I think—I know I was never made to do anything I did not like."

The young ladies smiled and looked at each other but said nothing; they, doubtless, thought how weak Minnie's mother must have been.

Just at this moment, the sight of the post-man coming up the drive, caused so general an excitement that all conversation was stopped, each one of the party running to get their respective letters.

CHAP. VI.

New Comers.

MINNIE was soon engrossed in the perusal of her letter. It was from her mother; so that she scarcely heard Miss Ferrars say to her sister—

“The Harrowbys are coming. What a nuisance, with Frank at home.”

Her mother's letter was full of love and kindness, and contained all the news of the little village. Amongst the rest it spoke of Robin Dale's marriage to a woman much older than himself, and said how much astonishment it had created in the village, for he was never supposed to be a marrying man. Rose Hill had been bought, which had stood so long empty; and the new occupants were daily ex-

pected. Mary Stone and Philip Dray had been asked in church, and were to have the Home Farm to live in; and the old mill was to be pulled down.

All interesting news to Minnie, as interesting as a change in the Ministry would be to her husband. She was so deep in her letter, that she did not perceive that she was alone. All the young ladies had gone to communicate the intelligence of the intended visit of the Harrowbys; but she had not strolled along the shrubbery far, before she was joined by the gentlemen who had been in search of her.

"Any news?" asked her husband.

"A letter from Mamma; here it is."

And she handed it to him.

"What has become of my sisters?" said Ferrars. "How came they to leave you alone?"

"I was so rudely engrossed in my letter, that I deserved to be left alone. I think they have

taken their own letters in to read. I fancied I heard something about visitors coming."

"Some visitors coming to stay?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Did you hear their names?"

"I'm not sure I exactly caught it, Haverly, though, I think."

"Haverly, I don't know such a name. You don't mean Harrowby, do you?"

"Oh! yes; that was the name."

An expression of annoyance passed over Ferrars' face, but he said nothing; and soon after, he made some excuse to go into the house, and Woodford and Minnie remained in the shubbery talking over their mother's letter, and of their new home in the country, to which Minnie was looking forward with such delight.

"Well," at length said Woodford, "I must go and look up that fellow, Ferrars, he promised to drive me to Waltham; I suppose a dog-cart won't be quite to your taste, Pet?"

"No, thank you, love! What time does the

post go from here?—I think I shall go and write to mamma, and tell her your kindness, you dear old fellow."

"I don't think the post goes out till the evening; but it would be as well to write, if you wish; because they are sure to have the carriage out after lunch, and you may only just be home in time to dress for dinner."

"And I may really tell mamma you are quite in earnest?"

"Quite."

Minnie gave him a look of grateful affection, which he felt repaid him for any sacrifice—(they had only been married six months)—and, entering the house, she made her way to the morning room, where she understood the girls generally sat; and Woodford went to seek Ferrars. Dora met Minnie at the door:

"Oh! Mrs. Woodford," she said, "I was just coming to find you—it was very rude of us to run away from you; but I went to take papa's letters to him, and the other girls ran to tell

mamma to prepare for some visitors, who sent us word they are coming to-morrow. Are you tired of being out?"

"I do feel rather tired; and I thought I would come in and write my letters," answered Minnie.

"Very well: the post does not go out till half-past six; but we always write our letters in the morning, and deposit them on the hall-table; and the man takes them when he goes home to his tea, at five o'clock; but if, at any time, you want a letter sent later, let me know, and I'll see it goes."

"Thank you; I will fetch my desk, and join you in the morning room, then."

"Yes—we are all going to be there, as busy as bees."

Busy as bees they certainly were—for, when Minnie entered the room, she found the table strewn with flannel, linens, and prints, so that it had to be cleared to make room for her little writing case. At a small table in the window

Dora was busily engaged with some dried plants. Miss Ferrars was with her mother, making arrangements for the arrival of the expected guests. Minnie amused herself with writing her letters, chatting to the girls, and watching their varied occupations till luncheon; the gentlemen came in late—and Ferrars was very silent during the whole meal, and ate very little.

After luncheon, two of the girls and Minnie, with Mrs. Ferrars, went for a drive; reaching home just in time to dress for dinner; their party increased by the curate, whom Minnie thought paid very exclusive attentions to Miss Lucy. In the evening a variety of games and puzzles were produced, which Minnie, Edward, and young Ferrars and the curate, amused themselves with,—while the young ladies diligently plied their worsted needles on the church carpet, occasionally coming to help “the babies” as they laughingly called them, with their puzzles; and so the evening passed away. And the

next day, at twelve o'clock, the carriage was sent to the station to meet the Harrowbys, Mrs. Ferrars apologising most profusely to Minnie for depriving her of her drive; but, as the distance to the station was rather considerable, Mr. Ferrars would not like the horses taken out again.

Minnie assured her she should be perfectly happy, strolling about the lovely garden; for that the very sight of trees and flowers was to her such a treat, she needed nothing more. The luncheon was postponed half-an-hour for the guests,—but Minnie, perfectly happy, ensconced under a tree on the lawn, with her books, took no note of time; she sat there, looking up occasionally through the branches of the trees into the deep intense blue of the sky, listening to the twittering of the birds and the murmuring of the stream, a sweet sound to her, for it carried her home—home to dear Grassdale and her mother,—and then the book fell from her hand, and she began to dream of

the future,—of the new home there with her husband, and perhaps her child!—of all the dearly-loved and well-remembered scenes, which it would be so delightful to visit, in her new character of wife and mother. Aye, Minnie was a sad dreamer—moralists would have grievous fault to find with her—those who say how idle and wrong it is to indulge in day-dreams—would have reasoned gravely with Minnie; but she would have told them they knew not half the delight of that luxury they would deny her—she would have told them, in the words of a sweet poetess,—

“ In the inmost chambers of my soul
There is another world, a blessed home,
O'er which no living power holdeth control,
Anigh to which ill things do never come !
There shineth the glad sunlight of clear thought ;
With hope, and faith, holding communion high,
Over a fragrant land with flowers wrought.
Where gush the living springs of poesy,
There speak the voices that I love to hear ;
There smile the glances that I love to see,
There live the forms of those my soul holds dear,
For ever in that secret world with me ! ”

And in that secret world Minnie remained till the sound of wheels in the carriage-drive disturbed her, and then she rose and entered the house, by the open window of the morning room, which she found vacated by the girls, who had gone to welcome the new comers. Minnie waited there until the bell announced luncheon, and then she went into the drawing-room, where she was introduced to Mrs. and Miss Harrowby; the former a quiet-looking elderly lady; the latter so very beautiful, that Minnie almost started as she saw her. She was very pale, and the perfect regularity of her features, gave her face the appearance of being chiselled in marble. Her head of a beautiful shape, was adorned with a profusion of hair of so unusual a colour, that I cannot describe it; it was neither chestnut nor auburn, but something between, or rather made up of the two. She wore it plain, with a massive plait over the crown, the tip of her ears being allowed to show, in which were large

ear-rings of a beautiful classic pattern. Her dress was a deep blue silk, high to her throat, with a small collar, fastened by a brooch, matching the ear-rings; her belt was fastened with a gold clasp, but beside that, she had no other ornament. Minnie felt singularly attracted by her, although, there was something in the expression of her face which was not pleasing, spite of its extreme beauty. And for some reasons, for which she could not account, the recollection of Agnes Hay came vividly before her; and she thought how much more she preferred her, with her comparatively plain face, to the brilliant beauty before her. Woodford and Ferrars, did not appear at luncheon; and when the meal was concluded, they all strolled out on the lawn; some taking their books, and some their work.

“Oh! Isabella,” said Miss Ferrars, addressing Miss Harrowby, “you must positively this time make me a sketch of the house, we

have found such a pretty peep at it from the further meadow."

"I shall be very happy, I am sure. I will do it this afternoon, if you like?"

"Oh ! thank you, dear, any time before you go."

"Here comes Frank," said Dora, looking earnestly at her sister, and speaking hurriedly.

Miss Ferrars frowned at her, and answered quickly.

"They've had a long drive ; I wonder if they will want lunch ! I'll go and ask them ;" and she walked towards the gentlemen, as they drove up to the door.

Minnie, who was standing near Miss Harrowby, noticed that her pale face crimsoned violently for a second, and then left her even paler than before ; and as Minnie was rather fond of dreaming, as I have said, she instantly began to weave a little romance, in which Miss Harrowby and Frank Ferrars were to perform the principal characters. It was with great

interest, therefore, she watched their meeting; but saving that Ferrars' little nervous hesitation was rather more apparent than usual, the most critical observer could detect no emotion on either side.

Miss Ferrars appeared rather fidgetty and uneasy, Minnie thought, and seemed as much as possible to try and keep Ferrars and Miss Harrowby apart. At length, archery was proposed; and they all adjourned to the meadow where the targets were put up.

Minnie said she would rather look on, as she knew nothing of it, and had never taken a bow in her hand; so Ferrars fetched her a camp-stool, and she was much amused watching the sport, and admiring Miss Harrowby's grace and skill. When the large bell sounded the hour for dressing for dinner, and the game was given up, Ferrars came at once to Minnie and walked by her side, carrying her stool for her.

"I think we might have a match whilst

you are here," he said, "and shoot for a prize; it is a pretty graceful game, isn't it?"

"Very pretty, and Miss Harrowby is most skilful; she would get the prize."

"I don't know; Agnes Hay is quite as good a shot; and, I understand, returns home to-morrow. I think we might get a match up on Tuesday."

"I am afraid we shall not be here," said Minnie. "We have an engagement on Monday."

"Can't you get off?"

"I should like it excessively; but I fear Edward would not."

"Oh, we must see what we can do with him. An ingenious letter about the impossibility of getting back to town might be concocted, I think."

"Well, I must leave it in your hands. I should like it."

"I'll do my best; stay, let me cut you this lovely rose; ladies should always have a

bouquet for dinner." And, taking a knife from his pocket, he cut the rose and some jessamine and a few geraniums, and soon made a lovely little bouquet, for which Minnie thanked him very cordially, and went upstairs to dress.

"Where did you get that nosegay," asked her husband, as he came into her room just as she had finished dressing.

"Ferrars gave it me," she answered.

"Ferrars! Well, I'm sure; that's rather strange, is it not?"

"No, I think not; why?"

"Well, I don't know; but married women should scarcely accept flowers from other men."

"My dear Edward, what! Cut from his own garden, and given before every one! I cannot see the slightest possible impropriety."

"Oh dear, no, perhaps not, but I would rather have given them to you myself."

"I won't wear them, if you do not think I ought."

"Oh! yes, wear them now, it does not signify"; and he went down stairs; but it was with less satisfaction than at first that Minnie fastened the bouquet into her dress.

True-hearted Minnie, she loved her husband dearly; she could not imagine for a moment the possibility of liking anybody better, or preferring attentions from any one. Far, far more would she have valued the flowers had he given them to her; and she was pained to find he was evidently vexed at her accepting them from Ferrars. However, she thought it better to wear them, they would soon droop, and then she could throw them aside; but, still, it came across her like a cloud over the sun, and she began to think it would be better if they did not stay beyond their appointed time at Moorlands, and determined to find an opportunity to tell Ferrars not to ask her husband to stay longer. But when the gentlemen joined the ladies in the drawing-room after dinner, she found that Ferrars had made the request, and

persuaded Woodford to go up alone on Monday and return on Tuesday, and they would arrange the archery party for Wednesday; so Minnie took the first opportunity to ask her husband, if he really had no objection to the arrangement, for she had not the slightest wish to stay if he did not like it; but he assured her he had not the least objection, as she was happy and content, that was quite enough. He appeared to have forgotten all about the flowers, and had quite resumed his old cheerful careless manner.

"You must sing, little woman, presently," he said. "I shall go and see if I can start some music. I wonder if the beauty sings; she is wonderfully lovely, isn't she?"

"Yes, she is, indeed; I never saw anything alive so beautiful; don't you think there's something between her and Ferrars?"

"Well, I don't know; he seemed anxious to be out of the way yesterday when they arrived, but he said nothing; you know he's an awfully

close fellow, never tells one anything. Oh! see, she's going to the piano. Well, she can't beat my little wife, that's one thing."

There was a "hush" to the voices, and Miss Harrowby began to sing, if singing it could be called, which was more like speaking to music. It was very strange and yet very beautiful, like herself, Minnie thought. The song was a legend of a girl, who required some great sacrifice from her lover before she would wed him. He tries many things, but she considers none of sufficient magnitude; and he then tells her that he knows of only one greater, that is, to give her up. Her despair, when she finds how, by her trifling with this true love, she has lost it, drives her to madness, and she flings herself into a lake, the waters of which had ever since been troubled. The expression of Miss Harrowby's face was very beautiful while she sung, and Minnie watched Ferrars as well. He sat at a little distance from the piano turning over a book of engravings, but that he did not

see them Minnie felt sure. His face wore an expression she had never seen on it before,—that of contemptuous disdain.

At the conclusion of the song, there was a low murmur of applause round the room; but, notwithstanding the intense feeling she seemed to throw into it, Miss Harrowby appeared as calm and placid as ever when she moved from the instrument. But the watchful Minnie noticed that her first glance was fixed on Ferrars, and she fancied she perceived a slight look of annoyance at his pre-occupation with the portfolio of prints.

After the usual remarks on the beauty of the song and its execution, the inquiries for the composer's name, etc., Minnie was asked to sing; and her bright lovely voice, with the joyous inspiriting song she sang, seemed quite refreshing after the gloom of the previous performance. Ferrars had deserted the prints, and was standing behind her when she rose.

“Why, Mr. Ferrars, I thought you did not

like music," said Minnie, with a mischievous glance.

"Yes, I do like music very much. What made you think so?"

"You seemed to like drawings better just now."

"I am no judge of music, and don't like things without a tune."

Minnie laughed, as she walked back to her seat drawing on her gloves.

"It is not much use your putting on these gloves, we shall want them off again directly," he said.

"Oh! no, your sisters have done nothing yet."

"True, they can play, by-the-bye. I'll send some of them to do so; they ought, by rights, to have begun." And he went to his sisters; and, after some conversation, persuaded them to play some duet quadrilles. He then returned to Minnie, and kept up a lively bantering conversation with her during the rest of the evening.

Occasionally Minnie felt rather than saw that Miss Harrowby's eyes were fixed on them ; and she retired to rest that night more than ever convinced that there was a mystery between Miss Harrowby and Ferrars, which, with that feeling supposed to be natural to women, she was most desirous to find out.

CHAP. VII.

The Archery Meeting.

NOTHING of any moment occurred the next few days. Woodford took his departure for London to fulfil his engagement, and Minnie felt almost ashamed of herself for feeling so utterly miserable at losing him for two days; but she did, especially as his last words were, "Don't flirt too much with Ferrars."

The idea of her flirting with any one, now she was married, seemed to her so shocking; she, with her pure innocent mind, could see in it no jest, no subject for mirth. To her it seemed a sin, which she could not bear to imagine herself guilty of; and again, and again, she questioned herself, and thought over all she

had said or done, which could make her husband think she had flirted with Ferrars. At any rate, she determined to be most guarded in his absence, and so scarcely exchanged words with him beyond the common daily salutations.

The morning Edward was expected back, Ferrars came into the room where Minnie was at work, and said :—

“I think, Mrs. Woodford, you would like to go to the station to meet your husband. I have, therefore, asked my mother to order the brougham. Perhaps you will explain to Woodford, that that is the reason I did not drive the dog-cart to fetch him.”

“Thank you, Mr. Ferrars; how very kind and thoughtful of you. I should like it very much, for, do you know, I am really silly enough to feel as though Edward had been gone a week.”

“Indeed! It is your first separation, is it not?”

"Yes; but I should never get used to it, if you mean that."

Ferrars smiled as he answered—

"I was not going to suggest anything so treasonable; the carriage will be here in five and twenty minutes."

"Thank you, I will be ready."

"Where are you going to, Frank?" asked his sister Lucy.

"Oh, for a 'moon' somewhere."

"A moon! What words you use. I'm sure we ought to have a dictionary to understand you. I'm going as far as the schools, and I thought you might as well go with me."

"Very well, get ready then; don't be more than two hours, or I shall be tired of waiting."

"Frank, how can you be so silly; you know I am never more than ten minutes. There's the newspaper, read that, and you won't know how long I am." So saying, she ran off; and Minnie, after folding up her work, followed her to get ready for her drive. There was only

one other occupant of the room, Isabella Harrowby, who was drawing at the small table in the window.

She looked up suddenly as the door closed, and then bent her head down over her drawing, but made no remark.

Ferrars looked up from his newspaper, and said :—

“ You were so quiet, Miss Harrowby, I did not know you were in the room.”

“ Did you not?” she answered, without raising her head.

“ You are fond of drawing, are you not?”

“ Very.”

“ Do you like it better than music!”

“ No.”

“ I suppose your own home abounds in beautiful subjects for sketching; it is such a lovely country.”

“ Yes.”

Nothing but these short answers, and her head still bent over her drawing.

She might have seen a contemptuous curl of the lip had she looked at her interrogator's face as he took up the newspaper again. But he had no time to read it, for his sister entered.

"There, sir. I have just been seven minutes."

"Wonderful! Come along—are you tidy, though," he said, turning her round.

"Don't be so absurd, Frank; of course I am. Good bye, Isabella, I shall not be long, and Dora is coming to you directly."

"Oh! I don't mind being alone, I assure you, Lucy. I never quarrel with myself."

"Don't you? Oh, I should with myself if I were left long alone."

"Lucy means to be very careful, consequently, never to be left in that predicament."

Lucy stood on tip-toe to box her brother's ears for this suggestion; but he eluded it very cleverly and escaped out of the room, shutting the door and holding it so that Lucy could not follow him; and, as she feared being late for

school, she had to promise not to molest him any more, before he would let her out. Still the head was not raised from the drawing, nor did the indefatigable hand cease its occupation, but when they were gone she moved from her place, and with her quiet stately step walked out of the room; and then, who would have known in that figure kneeling by her chair in her bed-room; her fingers tightly pressed upon her eyes, her whole form shaking with convulsive sobs, the pale impassive beauty, with her cold, calm, smile, who but a few moments before had been talking so coolly and composedly.

As lovely a day as ever shone out of the heavens gladdened the eyes of the archery party, on the Wednesday fixed for the meeting. A number of persons had assembled to see it, and Minnie was delighted at the gay and pretty sight. Her husband was to shoot, though he declared he knew nothing about it, and had not shot, till the last few days, since he had

used a child's bow and arrows whilst staying with his uncle when he was a good little boy. Agnes Hay came up to Minnie directly, and seemed very pleased to see her; but she thought her manner was not so easy and unconstrained as it had been when she first made her acquaintance. Mrs. Crawford was there, of course, in great force; but Edward expressed great disappointment that she had not come in a turban!

"Miss Harrowby looks very beautiful, Minnie, doesn't she," he said. "But positively, I think that little Agnes Hay looks more bewitching, and yet her face is almost plain by the side of the beauty—it's the expression that's so superior."

"Yes; that must be it. Do you know, oddly enough, directly I saw her I thought of Miss Hay, and decided, that I preferred her face, beautiful as the other is."

"Oh yes; she's a little trump, is Agnes; but I must run they're going to begin. Are you quite comfortable, Pet?"

"Yes, quite, thank you."

"Got a footstool? The chair looks high."

"It is, rather, but it doesn't matter."

"Oh yes it does," and away he ran, and returned shortly with a hassock.

"There now, little woman, that's better isn't it."

"Yes, much, darling, thank you; run away and win the prize."

"I have won *one*, and I'm perfectly satisfied," he said, bowing profoundly to her.

"Run away, and don't be a goose," she answered, laughing but very pleased, notwithstanding.

And she watched him all the time; saw him stand by Agnes and talk and laugh with her; and she thought how wise he was to prefer her to Miss Harrowby. And how nice it was of him to be so kind and attentive to the girl she had taken such a fancy to. Mrs. Ferrars, Mrs. Harrowby, and Lucy, who did not shoot, sat with her; and the latter amused her with in-

formation respecting several of the persons on the ground, whilst the two elder ladies chatted together.

The prize lay evidently between Agnes Hay and Miss Harrowby, and of course Minnie's sympathies, were enlisted in favour of the former. Ferrars came to speak to her once; and she asked him which of the two had the best chance. He said they were so equal he could not say; but, as he was speaking, Miss Harrowby shot an arrow into the bull's eye, and the loud shouts of applause proclaimed her the winner.

Minnie was disappointed; and the calm indifference with which Miss Harrowby received the prize when it was presented to her, did not erase the unpleasant impression which she had made on Minnie.

There was a cold collation provided in the house for the archery party and the spectators, and they were to finish up the evening with a dance. Minnie, who did not dance, was

exceedingly amused watching those who did. Miss Harrowby danced most gracefully, there was no denying, but seemingly without enjoyment. The same placid look was on her face, the same cool, calm, manner ; but Agnes Hay danced as though her heart danced too, her eyes sparkled, and her face flushed, and she looked as though she had come there to enjoy herself, and meant to do so. Especially Minnie noticed this intensely happy look when Ferrars was her partner ; but no wonder, for he was an excellent one. They seemed to fly round the room together, and were the last to sit down, and when, panting and exhausted, she at length found a seat, it was next to Minnie.

“ You seem very fond of dancing, Miss Hay,” said Minnie.

“ Yes, I am, very ; it is the most enjoyable of all amusements, I think. My will is never tired, I could dance all night ; but my breath strikes work so provokingly soon.”

"You have kept up longer than any one. Mr. Ferrars is an excellent partner, is he not?"

"Oh yes; I can always keep up with him better than any one."

"Miss Harrowby's dancing is very elegant, like everything she does."

"Yes," said Agnes, shortly.

"Of course you admire her."

"Her beauty, yes; who could help it?"

"But you don't like her," said Minnie.

"Mrs. Woodford, I never said so."

"I know you did not, but I cannot help fancying you and I agree about her."

"Don't you like her, then?" asked Agnes.

"Well, I ought not to say I don't; for I know nothing of her, either for or against her; but I confess I am not prepossessed."

"She behaved very ill to some one I know and value very much; and, therefore, I am prejudiced," said Agnes.

They were interrupted, greatly to Minnie's

vexation, who wished to learn a little more of Miss Harrowby, by Ferrars bringing up a gentleman to introduce to Minnie for a quadrille.

"Your husband told me you would dance a quadrille, he was sure;" he said.

"Then I suppose I must," answered Minnie, and she took the offered arm.

And Ferrars took her seat beside Agnes.

"I have had very little talk with you," he said, "since your return; and I suppose this is scarcely the time or place. Were you not astonished to see our guests?"

"If I *could* be astonished at anything a certain party did, I should have been. Depend upon it, Mr. Ferrars, I am right."

"The time is past, even if you are;" he answered with that old curl of his lip which so often marred the beauty of his face. "A girl of her age ought to know her own mind; and if she does not, she must bear the penalty. I wonder why," he said suddenly, after a pause,

"I have told you so many things which I have never told any one else. From quite a little girl you have listened to all my tales and kept my council too, bravely, Agnes."

He seldom called her Agnes, never before people. Oh! Ferrars; are you blind, that you do not see the glad surprise and rosy blush it seems to have summoned? He goes on quietly talking—

"My sisters seem aware of something, but I am sure *you* have not betrayed my confidence."

"Indeed not, Mr. Ferrars, it has never passed my lips to human being."

"No, I believe you. Our own manner has betrayed us, I dare say; though I have thought myself very guarded. When my sisters said they were invited, I felt sure they would excuse themselves, and was certainly astonished at their coming. But you women are very strange."

"Some of us," said Agnes, smiling.

"All of you ; it is impossible to count upon a woman's actions, or to understand her feelings."

"Sometimes she doesn't understand them herself. I once saw a play in which some one tells the two girls, that one looks as though she had said 'Yes' when she meant 'No,' and the other looks as though she had said 'No' when she meant 'Yes.' I think that is too often a real case."

"But how do you account for such foolish contrariety."

"It is difficult to account for ; but I think the early education of women is at fault. The way in which they are tutored to conceal their feelings, and told that they must never show that they love ; but I agree with Mat in 'A Life for a Life,' when he says, 'Never be ashamed to show how much you love, for it is a woman's glory and a man's salvation.' But we are getting too grave and sentimental, and here comes Mr. Woodford, to whom

I am engaged for the next polka; so good bye."

And she took Woodford's arm and was soon whirling in the dance, as joyously as ever.

Ferrars remained where she had left him for some time in deep thought. And Minnie sat in an arm chair, where she had ensconced herself after her quadrille, watching her favourite Agnes and her husband dancing, with a smile upon her lips of pleasant satisfaction which made her lovely face still lovelier.

"How very very lovely your wife is, Mr. Woodford," said Agnes, when they paused to take breath.

"She's not amiss, is she. I've seen plainer women."

"I should think so, indeed."

"Miss Harrowby eclipses every one that she comes near, though," said Woodford.

"Not your wife; it's quite a different kind of beauty."

"My wife has only got one fault, that's a

dislike to London ; she won't be happy away from the country."

"Then you must take her there."

"Well ; but I prefer town."

"That is unfortunate. You can only under these circumstances consider which is most agreeable to you, to make your wife happy or live in town to make yourself so. You will do what is most agreeable to yourself finally, because men always do."

"Miss Hay, how very severe. Now you will give me no credit either way ; if I take a house in the country for my wife's sake, much as I hate it, you will still consider that I have done what is most agreeable to myself."

"Yes ; but recollect I shall consider you very amiable and very fond of your wife, because it will show that to see her happy is most agreeable to yourself."

"Then all amiable people are selfish, and in their kind actions to others only please themselves. Is that your opinion, Miss Hay ?"

"Now don't try to puzzle me, Mr. Woodford," said Agnes laughing; "and I will explain what I do mean. Supposing you were to make a sacrifice for any one you did *not* love and whose happiness you had no care for, you would be doing what would be very unselfish and very meritorious; but to make your wife happy whom you do love, is surely only another way of making yourself so."

"Well it seems to me a new way of putting it. However, Miss Hay, I shall merit your entire approbation; which I am sure will be a great encouragement to me, for I have decided on taking a country house, if I can get one."

"Indeed! Here?"

"No, at Grassdale—my wife's birthplace. Now is not that very pretty of me?"

"Very proper of you; but I wish it had been here, because I should have become better acquainted with your wife."

"Grassdale is not an impossible distance; and I know it will give Minnie great pleasure

to see you—could you not come and stay with us?”

“I should like it very much, if Mrs. Crawford would spare me.”

“I must try my powers of persuasion; and I shall look forward to your coming to make a country life endurable. I cannot live without society. And if I have a house in the country, I must keep it full of guests; but we must have another turn before the music stops. You are not too tired?”

“Oh! no, I can keep up a little longer.” And away they went again.

At the end of the dance, Mrs. Crawford requested Ferrars to tell Agnes, she was ready to go; and their departure was the signal for others. And so the evening ended, every one agreeing that it had been a most delightful day, with the exception of Miss Harrowby, who made no remark whatever.

The following Friday, Minnie and her husband returned to town, and to her great delight he wrote at once to his uncle, requesting him to endeavour to find a home for him in Grassdale, or its neighbourhood; and only a few days elapsed before Mr. Bellamy answered the letter, with the information that a pretty residence with a farm attached was to be had, about a mile and a half from Grassdale; he knew a man, he said, willing to take the farm off his hands, if the house suited him, and concluded by suggesting that he should come down either with or without his wife, from Saturday until Monday and see the place.

Minnie was charmed at the thought. She should see her dear mother, and have a peep at Grassdale earlier than she expected; so it was settled, and on Saturday they started. Mrs. Foster was at the Rectory to receive them, and Mr. Bellamy kindly asked her to dinner on the Sunday; and early on Monday

morning they drove over to see the house, which so delighted Minnie, that Edward at once decided on taking it; and Mr. Bellamy undertook to superintend the labours of plasterers, bricklayers, and paper-hangers, who were voted necessary, and who promised that the house should be tenable in two months' time.

Minnie went home in great spirits, and was most anxious to communicate her intelligence to Phœbe, who, she thought, would be as delighted as she was herself. Her surprise, therefore, was great, when Phœbe said, if her mistress was going to reside in the country she must leave, as she would prefer living in London so very much herself, and had strong objections to returning to Grassdale. Minnie, though much astonished and disappointed—for as I before said, Phœbe was a great favourite with her mistress—of course only said she could please herself; and accordingly, at the end of a month from that time, Phœbe

left her place to go and live amongst strangers, but anywhere rather than Grassdale, where she should see Robin the husband of another.

CHAP. VIII.

Robin's Wife.

AND now, with the privilege which is awarded to writers of fiction, I will imagine two or three months to have passed away. The London season is over; the women have gone away to saunter on velvet lawns and in shady shrubberies to dream over their conquests, or mourn over their failures; the men to their grouse and partridge-shooting; and the gay and crowded metropolis is now emptied of all who are not forced to live there. We will follow the fashion, and betake ourselves to the country.

There is a pretty little house in the centre of a village street, with small casemented windows covered with jessamine. The flowers

have been very plentiful on it this year, but it is late now. They are over; it has done blooming, and the leaves are beginning to fall. The garden is very neat; it opens into a large yard, in which are huge waggon wheels and pieces of timber, and a cart very gayly painted blue and red, and an old gig with "For Sale" on it, and a shed with a carpenter's bench in it and a whole heap of shavings, and a great deal of rusty iron, tools, etc., etc.

It is evening—a cool September evening—which makes the ruddy blaze of the wood fire burning in the kitchen of the little cottage very pleasant to see and sit by. Beside it sits a man ruddy-looking, healthy, and handsome for his class; older-looking, too, than perhaps he is; for his head is nearly bald, but what little hair he has is a rich brown. Opposite to him sits a thin individual with a pale face, marked with lines which seem more of care than age, with thick wiry hair, half grey; his hands are on his knees, and, as he talks, he shakes his head

gravely and lifts his eyes to the ceiling, whether to inspect the hocks of bacon which hang there to smoke, or whether in his imagination he sees better and brighter things beyond, I know not. A clean and rather comely woman of middle age is engaged preparing the supper, now and then pausing to listen to the conversation between the two men, but making no observation herself, save an occasional interjection accompanied also by a glance at the hocks of bacon.

The thin man with the wiry grey hair, spoke in a thin wiry voice, and with a slightly nasal twang; he laid great stress on the first syllable of every word, which added to the peculiarity of his utterance; but his voice must have appeared melodious to himself, for he loved to hear it.

“Surely, neighbour, you reckon smoking among the lusts of the flesh. Ah! dear me, yes; what is it else, what does it do for your poor soul? Ah! dear me, what, indeed?”

"It does a great deal for my poor body," answered his companion in a rich racy voice, which was all the more refreshing to listen to from the contrast with his friend. "And we must take care o' that so long as we're burdened with it, Daniel. Many a time when I've felt a kind o' creeping come over me, like you might at seeing a sneake crawling towards you, I've lighted my pipe;" and as he spoke, he did light a pipe which lay on a table beside him. "I've lighted my pipe and begun to smoke it, and felt as though I warnt afraid o' sneakes nor nothing else, as though I was a man, a good big one too, big enough to tread under my foot any sneakes who might come and leave their slime and poison in my home; and so, Daniel, I love my pipe, and always shall," and as he finished his speech, he put his pipe in his mouth and sent forth a mighty puff.

"Ah! dear me; sad, sad, indeed!" said his visitor, polishing his knees and again calmly studying the hocks of bacon. "Oh! what a

blessed day it would be for me, if I could only bring you to sit under our blessed minister. My poor words are nothing; he would make you see your sins, he would shew you your misery, the pit of destruction you are lying in so blindly. Ah! dear me, yes."

"Hark 'e Daniel," said the other man, "it's best to drop this; it's a weary subject, which profits neither you nor me, so long as the Church spire raises itself to the blessed sky above us, so long will I worship under its roof; so long as a real ordained minister does duty in this parish, week-a-days and Sundays, so long will I attend the services he provides; and if it should please God to take such means away from me, I'd take my prayer-book out in the fields, and read those wonderful prayers there, which have been my stay and comfort for many a long year; but go into your chapel, to hear a poor ignorant man ranting and raving about what neither he nor his hearers understand, I won't, so there's an end on 't."

"We'd better sit down to supper now," interrupted the woman, in a slow and rather drawling voice; "it's quite ready."

"Ah! there's a many a poor creature, Anne, has got no supper to sit down to; and we know not how soon we may have none," said the wiry man.

"There are none that I know of," answered the other man, "thank God, of my own knowledge. I've made it a rule, Daniel, and my father did before me, to make sure as no one in our parish wanted food; and so I've always enjoyed my own from the comfort of knowing that. And now I suppose I must put my pipe down till after supper, I war'nt minding what I was about, or I should 'nt have begun it." And he rose from his chair, put his pipe on the chimney-piece; and, drawing to the table, the three began their meal, after a short but earnest and reverent grace had been said by the last speaker.

Whether the reflection that he knew not

how long he should have a supper affected the wiry man's appetite, I know not, but he certainly took in a supply which would have served an ordinary man for three meals; so perhaps he was providing against that period he mentioned. Soon after supper, he took his leave; and the husband and wife were alone.

"I shall finish my pipe, Anne, before I come up, so don't wait."

"Very well, Robin," answered his wife, sighing heavily as she prepared to clear the table. "I only wish you'd think a little more of what Daniel says."

"Anne, that's a forbidden subject; you'd better go up to bed at once, and say no more."

The woman made no reply but meekly continued her occupation of clearing the supper away, and then, lighting a candle, she left the room; and Robin continued smoking and staring into the fire, the glowing embers of which were gradually dying out. Occasionally a piece of stick would fall into the middle and

burn up quite cheerily, but soon die out again; yet still Robin continued gazing into the embers. Some people can fancy forms and faces in the fire, perhaps Robin did too; at any rate, he suddenly threw his pipe from him, and covering his face with his hands, his whole frame shook with strong emotion. He knew not how the time passed while he sat there; but at length he grew calmer, and, rising, he raked out the few lingering sparks of fire, and looking to see that the doors and windows were safely barred, he went up to bed. His wife was asleep; he entered the room very softly, shading the candle with his hand, and placing it where it would not be in her eyes, he went up to the bedside, and stood looking at her for a moment, "Poor Anne!" he murmured softly. She turned and started in her sleep, for a warm tear fell on her hand which lay outside the coverlet. Then Robin moved away, but, in his prayers that night, he prayed with more than common earnestness that God would help him

to make her happy whom he had vowed to love and cherish, and pardon the sin which made him take that oath in God's presence which he knew so little how to keep.

CHAP. IX.

Minnie's Baby.

A MILE and a half from this cottage was another home, to which I must take you for a time, where we shall find some old friends. It is a pretty Elizabethan cottage, standing in small but beautiful grounds; the rooms are not large, but furnished with taste; the room they call the Snuggery, most appropriately, is the one we will first enter — mind the steps — for there are two down into this room; it is very old, there is an oaken beam supporting the ceiling, on which is carved a date, 1590; the rest of the house is modern; this is all that is left of the old part. A bookcase is on one side, filled with books in good comfortable-looking bindings; a small piano stands in a recess;

a writing table, well covered with writing materials of all kinds, occupies the middle of the room, and a comfortable couch is drawn before the window, which looks out upon the lawn. A log of wood is burning on some ancient-looking and-irons,—and, on the high, narrow mantelpiece is ranged some beautiful old china; the curtains, carpet, table and sofa cover are green; a gilt basket stands in the window, filled with scarlet geraniums, and a large white sheepskin rug is before the fire, on which lies a black Skye terrier,—so that there is sufficient relief of colour to satisfy an artist, without the living group, even. On the sofa, in a white cashmere dressing-gown and little cap, with cherry-coloured ribbons peeping out from amongst the lace, and mingling with the hair in a very pretty and artful style, lies Minnie Woodford,—by her side, on two chairs, is a little cot, all white lace and cherry-coloured ribbons, too,—and inside it is so small a specimen of humanity, that it is wonderful how it ever

could have found so large a place in its mother's heart. A very pleasing-looking old lady, with quite white hair, plainly braided under a lace cap, with soft, loving hazel eyes, and regular features that spoke of the beauty of which, years ago, her husband had been so proud, is working beside the mother and child—sometimes pausing to draw the shawl more over Minnie's feet, or to peep at the sleeping babe.

"It has not been sleeping too long, mamma, dear—has it?"

"Oh! dear, no; it cannot sleep too long or too much for the next three months, unless it wakes exhausted;—you watch when it wakes, and you will see it throw its little arms over its head, and stretch and rustle about, long before it gives the little cry, which means, 'I'm hungry, feed me.'"

"That's just what dear nurse says, but you know I like to hear what you've got to say, darling mother; I cannot believe everything you do, and say, too."

"Silly child ; you are most fortunate in your nurse."

"Yes, that I feel I am,—and it is so lucky Edward likes her, for he has such a horror of such persons, and tried to persuade me she was not required, and that Jane could do. I am sure, if it had not been for you, I should have had no nurse at all. He does not notice baby much—does he?"

"Quite as much as I should expect him to ; don't worry him with it, that's all, and you may depend upon it he will love it in time ; but do not be disappointed if he cares little or nothing about it till it can talk—he will notice it occasionally, to please you, if you don't bore him into it,—and when it grows older he will notice it, to please himself."

A tap at the door interrupted them, and a tall, handsome-looking woman entered, whose large white muslin apron seemed like the badge of her profession, and proclaimed her nurse.

"Well, ma'am, how do you feel now? Could you take a little jelly?" she said, coming beside the sofa, and laying her cool soft hand tenderly on Minnie's head.

"No, thank you, dear nurse—at least, I will, if you think I ought—but I don't want it."

"Well, my dear, I think you ought; it is full two hours since you had anything to eat."

"That is right, Mrs. Fowler; she wants feeding very much—she is not remarkably strong, is she?"

"No; indeed, ma'am, Mrs. Woodford requires great care."

"I am sure she has it, then, you dear old thing," said Minnie, looking up, with a grateful smile, in her nurse's face.

At the moment a little rustling in the cot stopped the conversation; for the attention of nurse, mother, and grandmother was instantly directed to that living thing in whom so much of their love and anxiety was centred; and so

it was taken up and kissed, and admired, and held in its mother's arms, with as much care as if every finger had been a jewel, and all the down on its head as golden as it looked ; and then nurse said, whilst mamma had it, she would go and fetch the jelly, which she was sure she needed ; and though Minnie did not really care to eat it, she could not resist the pleading of her kind and patient nurse, and so took all she brought her.

"Don't go, nurse, until Mr. Woodford comes in," said Mrs. Foster, "sit here with your little charge, and amuse us with some of your tales;" and so nurse seated herself, and though baby had begun to fret a little for want of something better to do, she soon had it quiet in her broad lap, where it lay as warm and snug as a bird in its nest ; and she told them story after story, till the time past so rapidly, they were surprised to hear the sound of the wheels which brought Edward home. Nurse soon carried baby, cot, and all out of the room ; for

she knew that the young father was by no means anxious to have too much of his child's company; and she had far too much tact to force it upon him.

How few things to which we look forward with inexpressible pleasure ever turn out as agreeably as we hope, how often are our greatest joys accompanied by the dark shadows of a care, even as the brightest light throws the strongest shade. To have a child of her own which should call Edward "Father," had been Minnie's happiest dream; and yet with that child in her arms, Minnie had shed the bitterest tears which had ever dimmed her eyes. It was very foolish, perhaps, but she was weak and nervous; and it was so disappointing to hear Edward call it "a miserable ugly little brat," and bid the nurse take "the thing" away, and say that babies should be shut up till they had come to years of discretion; with like speeches, which to that young Mother sounded so cruel, spoken of that little being,

whose helplessness and need of care made it (by God's wise dispensation) dearer far to her. It was so disappointing, that he would never kiss or notice it, and only ask the nurse every day, when she was going to let Mrs. Woodford come down; for it was such miserable work being alone. Alas! this happiness for which she had so yearned, was mingled, indeed, with a sorrow she had never dreamed of; but Minnie was, as Mrs. Foster said, singularly fortunate in her nurse. She saw, for she was gifted with remarkable penetration, the entire state of affairs; and, instead of fanning the flame, as many would have done, she told Minnie heaps of instances of young men who never looked at their first children from shyness, but who in their hearts loved them dearly. And she always managed with admirable tact to take herself and the baby away when he was coming into the room, that the irritation might not be kept up. This was Minnie's first day down stairs, and she was looking forward to Edward's

return from his drive, with quite a little excitement, because she thought he would be so pleased. He was some time before he came into the room; and when he did, he only said:—

“Oh! you're down at last, are you? Well, I think it time. I was beginning to think of getting another wife, Mrs. Foster, as mine had grown so lazy.”

“How very fortunate then we got her down to-day,” said the dear old lady, looking up at her son-in-law with such a bright warm smile, that it must have chased away any amount of ill humour; “just in time, I hope too, before you have seen any likely young lady.”

“Just in time, and that's all.”

“Well, and how do you think she's looking now she is down?”

“Not amiss certainly, a little more bloom here would be better,” and he pinched Minnie's cheek lightly, as he spoke.

"The air will do that. If it is fine and dry to-morrow, we will try the garden."

Whether Edward read the expression of Minnie's face, which spoke of her disappointment, or whether he thought how very sweet that pale lovely face looked, I know not; but he stooped and kissed it very fondly, and in a moment the cloud was gone. The long white fingers were clasped tightly about his neck; and so many warm kisses were showered on his face, that Mrs. Foster at length interposed, and suggested that Minnie should not eat him all at one meal, but leave some for the next day. And this little jest made Minnie laugh out joyously; and altogether matters assumed such a much more cheerful aspect, that Edward drew a chair near his wife's sofa and sat down, and began to chat quite happily; and then Minnie said she had had a letter that morning, and that he must guess who it was from. He made a great many attempts, but could not guess; so then she took from her basket a

letter and handed it to him to read. It was from Agnes Hay, congratulating Minnie on the birth of her little daughter, and begging the favour of a line to say how they both were.

"I'll write to her myself, shall I?" said Edward.

"Yes, do dear, she will be so pleased, and my hand is too shakey, to do much in that way yet; I am going to write a little pencilled letter to your mother to-day, and I think Edward, dear, we ought to ask her to the christening."

"Oh! yes, certainly; when is the little brat to be christened?"

"Next Sunday week, I thought."

"Sunday! what's that for?"

"Your uncle always has the christenings on Sunday in the service. I do not see why our little darling should not be christened with all the other children."

"Oh! I don't care, I'm sure. The little

animal must have a name, I suppose; and the day of the week makes no difference, that I know of. Poor little Minnie," he said, stooping over her and again kissing her, " she can't bear to hear that wonderful baby spoken of so lightly, can she ? "

An expression of pain had passed over Minnie's face; but it was not about the child. A deeper and mightier shadow had been thrown across her then. With the birth of her little one, had come, as it does I believe to most women, more earnest anxious thoughts about "the things which concern our peace." She had passed through great tribulation; she had been as it were, re-united to her husband by a mighty Power; a fresh joy—a new love, had been given her; and her heart was full of gratitude—full of softened feelings, of good resolutions. Every sacred duty appeared more imperative, every act of devotion more necessary; and it came upon her like a new and unexpected grief, that her

husband, so dearly loved, should speak, and, therefore of necessity, think lightly of that holy and most solemn sacrament, when they should bring their darling to Him who loved the little ones, and bade them come to Him.

A rush of painful thoughts came into her mind ; could she talk to him about it?—could she alter his views ? No, she felt that impossible ; the subject seemed to her too full of awe to be argued upon :—if he had not, from his childhood, been taught to see such matters in their right light, she felt she was too weak, too ignorant, to teach him now ; poor, gentle Minnie,—helpless as she felt herself, she sought the best help she could ; and who can doubt that the simple, childlike prayer, which she breathed with so much earnestness and faith, “ God teach him ! ” was heard and answered.

Mrs. Foster, with a mother's readiness, saw the cloud ; but she thought it best to talk on, without giving Minnie time to make any answer to her husband.

"Who are to be the sponsors; have you decided that?" she asked.

"Ah! we ought to settle that; that's very important," said Edward;—"recollect how indebted I am to a sponsor."

"My sister Mary will be one," said Minnie, making an effort to overcome her feelings, and join again in the conversation; "and I do not know who to ask to be the other; for I should wish it to be some one I like and respect very much. Agnes Hay I should like; but I fear she would think it impertinent to ask her, on so short an acquaintance."

"Oh! no; I don't think she would. She would take it as a compliment,—as it's meant, I'm sure. I've known her a long time, and she'd be so jolly at the party. Oh! yes; let's ask her, by all means; and Ferrars for the godfather, eh?"

"Yes, I had thought of that, as your oldest friend," said Minnie.

"That's capital; I'll write both the letters to-night. I shall have a bit of lunch now, first, and go across to the Vicarage; I want to speak to my uncle."

"Very well, love; shall you dine there?"

"No, I think not. I don't know, though; don't wait"; and, with a yawning, listless air, he sauntered out of the room.

Mrs. Foster rose; and, pressing her lips on her child's forehead, said,—

"You had better have your book, and read yourself to sleep, now, darling; you look rather tired."

Minnie only smiled in answer; she felt as though she could not speak just then; maybe, she was thinking how she should have fared, if this dear mother had not been near her; for there had scarcely been a day since her baby's birth that Edward had been at home. She could not, she felt, reasonably complain; it was very dull for him down-stairs — but

she had heard other women say, that their husbands often came to tea with them in their rooms, and that those were such cosy, happy evenings, she had quite looked forward to them ; however, Edward had never suggested such a thing, but dined out every day.

CHAP. X.

The Christening.

WELL, the time wore on; and Minnie gradually, though slowly, regained her strength, making more efforts than she ought to please her husband; and, therefore, in consequence, being longer arriving at complete recovery.

Agnes Hay had written a charming letter, accepting the office of sponsor; and Ferrars had also consented. They were both to arrive on the Saturday before the Sunday fixed for the christening. Agnes was to remain a week; but Ferrars wished to be up at Cambridge on the Tuesday after. Mrs. Woodford was to arrive by the same train; but she had managed to be a guest at the vicarage, for she was sure,

she wrote, "that her sweet Minnie could not bear so many in the house. Dear Fred would accompany her; he was a little grieved that he had not been asked to stand for the sweet babe, who, she begged, might be kissed tenderly for their fond mother."

"The idea of Fred dreaming of such a thing," said Edward; "why, he has not got a sixpence to bless himself with; and I'm sure could not even stand the spoon and fork business."

"I never thought of sponsors for what they could give, darling," said Minnie, gently: "but Fred certainly, except as being your brother, did not strike me as suited, at present, for such an office."

"Poor Fred,—he's rather a muff, I must own; and now, little Pet, I've got something for you," and he drew from his pocket a jeweller's box, which he placed in Minnie's hand.

She opened it eagerly; it contained a gold

bracelet, the clasp of which, as Edward pressed it, flew open, and disclosed an admirable photograph of himself; and, at the back, was a case for hair,—in which was mingled some white and brown hair, with a small mite of golden down on the top.

“Edward, darling,” said Minnie, a flush of delight covering her white face; “how very, very nice of you; the hair is mamma’s, your’s, and dear baby’s, is it not?”

“Exactly so; I can have it all taken out, and others substituted, if you like any better.”

“When you can find those I like better, you shall, darling; you don’t know how pleased I am; I can’t half say what I feel; now I shall have you always, even when you are out. How did you get baby’s hair?”

“I cajoled nurse out of that, though it was a hard matter. You’ll wear it, won’t you?”

“Indeed I will. I am such a child that I

must wear it at once, too." And, so saying, she clasped it on her arms. She showed it to her mother the moment she entered the room, who, of course, admired it very much, and was sincerely pleased, because she saw what new life this pretty attention of her husband's had given to Minnie, who had begun to indulge in gloomy fears that Edward's affection for her was cooling. In vain had Mrs. Foster assured her that men could not be always lovers; but Minnie said she was never tired of all the tender loving words he had at first lavished on her, and she could not understand why he should be. The fact that she had been ill and weak should only have endeared her more to him; and his apparent indifference had distressed her painfully.

"My child," her mother had argued, "you forget your illness has materially affected his comfort, and so has been a perpetual irritation to him. Thank God, all has gone well;—there has been no fear of losing you. He would have

forgotten all then but his love for you, his anxiety to save you. There has been no such excitement as that; and it has only been a nuisance to him. He has been deprived of your society—the house has been filled -up with old women,” she continued, smiling, “in the shape of mothers and nurses; and during the time he has seen you, your attention has been chiefly directed to a minute specimen of humanity, in which it is difficult for him to imagine any one taking an interest.”

“What! not his own child, mother?”

“That is a point he can hardly realise, until the little thing knows and loves him. At present, he only sees a little creature perpetually fighting and making faces, whom he cannot amuse, or be of the slightest use to in any way, and whom it is very difficult to get up the slightest affection for. He would be very sorry that it should be hurt, or suffer, or that anything should happen to it, for your sake; but I assure you, that the cases are very rare in which

a man loves his *infant* child for its own sake. It requires a singularly good-tempered, loving, and unselfish husband to stay at home, too, at such times, the rooms where he has been accustomed to his wife's cheerful presence look so unutterably dull. He does not like to order his own dinner, and the cook gets him nothing but a badly-dressed mutton chop; therefore you can scarcely wonder that he goes out when he can, knowing that his wife is perfectly well cared for, and has everything she can desire."

"Except the presence of her husband," said Minnie, sighing. "There are men in the world who would and do act differently, I am sure. I know one who would."

"My dear child," said her mother, earnestly and gravely, "never permit yourself to compare any man to your husband to his disadvantage. Shun the thought, if it enters your mind for a moment, and never by any chance strengthen it by giving it words."

Minnie had made no answer to this, and the

conversation had dropped ; but Mrs. Foster had been rather uneasy, and was much relieved and delighted at this fresh proof of Edward's love.

The christening-day arrived, and Minnie bore all the excitement better than she hoped ; and her sister and Agnes raved about her child, and nursed and kissed it to her heart's content. It received the names of Mary Agnes Hope, the latter being the mother's express wish, as it was Mrs. Foster's maiden name ; but Minnie, in her heart, had another reason for so naming her first little darling. On the Monday following, they had a party in honour of the event ; and Edward delighted his wife by telling her he was freshly in love with her. It was so charming to see her dressed in evening attire, and "out of that everlasting wrapping affair." She certainly did look very lovely and interesting, as everybody remarked. The next day, Minnie parted from her nurse with tears on either side. She had quite learnt, in this short time, to love her who had proved herself in every way worthy of her

vocation. "If I could write a book, Nursey dear," Minnie said, "I would put you in it, as a beautiful contrast to 'Mrs. Gamp.' Till I made your acquaintance, I had a horror of nurses, and now I shall love them all for your sake."

How true it is, that the way in which a thing is done ennobles it. The simplest household duty done in singleness of heart, fearing the Lord, "makes that and th' action fine."

The homely common duties of a house had been performed by this excellent woman so well, that she left the house beloved by one and all. No mischief-making tattle had made her enemies in the kitchen; no intrusiveness or presumption made her dreaded in the household; uniformly kind to all, cheerful, unselfish, and devoted to her patient, thoroughly understanding all she undertook she had merited and won the respect of all, and caused the hitherto dreaded name of her race to be

honoured for her sake. Edward, even, thanked her and shook hands with her, and said, if ever they had the misfortune to require such a person again he hoped she would come. Of course Minnie fancied all the next day, that baby was fidgetty and missed her management; and she did not like her nursemaid, and was constantly regretting Phoebe, whom she had all along hoped would act in that capacity, if ever she needed one.

However, Agnes Hay proved a great comfort to her; quieted the child, amused her husband, ran about for her, and in short proved herself one of those delightful persons in a house of whom one is never tired, who never seems in the way, and yet is always at hand when wanted.

Ferrars had started early in the morning; and her sister had gone by the same train, for she could not prolong her stay having a little girl of her own, only a few months old, to return to. Mrs. Woodford remained at the

Vicarage; and Mrs. Foster did not consider it necessary to continue her daily visits, so they had resumed the usual quiet tenor of their way, into which Agnes fell admirably.

"I feel as though I could never do without Agnes Hay," Minnie said to her husband. "She is such a comfort to me."

"Well; tell her to write and ask Mrs. Crawford to spare her another week."

"You are not tired of her, then."

"No, indeed! it would be a strange person to tire of her; her versatility is surprising. She is the most amusing companion I ever met."

That was one of her great attractions to Minnie, she kept her husband at-home; not one day had he been out since her arrival. And the evenings were so happy; Minnie still glad to occupy the sofa after the fatigues of the day, lay there, with some light work, watching her husband and Agnes playing at chess; or listening to Agnes singing, or to an

amusing war of words with Edward ; perfectly contented, so that she could see that dear husband and know he was happy and amused ; and, feeling that to Agnes she was indebted for this, the first admiration she felt for her had ripened into love. Agnes was very happy too ; who could help loving that unselfish lovely Minnie ? Edward amused and interested her ; and for babies she had a perfect passion, so that all elements of enjoyment were here for her, and she gladly wrote to Mrs. Crawford for permission to extend her stay.

In reply, Mrs. Crawford said, that she was going away from home for a month to a sick sister, and that if her friends liked to keep her during that time, she was quite welcome to stay ; but if that was too long a time, there, of course, would be the house and servants, and she could return when she liked. Agnes showed the letter at once to Minnie, who said it would give her the greatest possible pleasure to have her ; and so it was arranged.

CHAP. XI.

Phœbe's Secret.

ONE day, when Minnie and Agnes were out for a stroll, they met a very respectable-looking woman, who paused, and made Minnie a respectful curtsy.

"Oh! Mrs. Winter," said Minnie, "how d'ye do; have you heard from Phœbe lately?"

"I'm sorry to say, ma'am," answered the woman, "that she has come home very ill. I had a letter yesterday morning from her, only to say that she was coming, and the carrier's cart brought her in last night. I don't know what ails her; I've had the doctor to her, and he calls it some hard name, I don't mind, just now. She seems much worse this morning. I'm just going for some medicine for her.

When she got home she was so strange; she cried, and kept saying, 'Oh! why did they send me home,' and wring her hands in such a way; and then, when I said, 'Surely, gal, you like to come home to your poor mother,' she flung her arms round my neck, and sobbed in such a awful 'sterical' sort of way—it was dreadful to hear."

"Poor girl," said Minnie; "I am so sorry. I will come and see her, if you think she would like to see me; and if there is anything I can do for her, pray let me know."

"She would like to see you, I know, ma'am; but the doctor says she must be kep' very quiet; but, as soon as she get a little better, I shall be very pleased for you to come, if you'll have the goodness."

"Certainly; you must let me know when she is able to see me, and what she may take, in the way of nourishment."

"You're very good, ma'am; thank you. I must go on now, for I've only left a neighbour

with her ;" and, with a curtesy to the ladies, the poor woman hurried off, wiping away, with the corner of her shawl, the tears, that the relation of her sorrow had caused to flow.

Poor Phœbe! every hour she grew worse ; and at last she knew no one, and began to talk sadly and incessantly — constantly mentioning one name. It was late in the evening ; her mother was seated by her side, and a neighbour was with her, who had kindly offered to keep watch with her all night. Phœbe lay with her long brown hair strewed over the pillow, her face flushed, and her eyes shining with unnatural brilliance, still keeping on that painful, ceaseless talking. There came a low tap at the house door, and then the latch was softly opened, and a man's step was heard in the lower room. Mrs. Winter thought it might be the doctor, and stole gently down to him,—but, instead of the doctor, before her stood Robin Dale.

" I'm grieved, Mrs. Winter, to hear that—

that your daughter is so ill," he said, in a low voice ; " may I see her ? "

" Better not, Robin ; she wouldn't know you—she knows no one. "

" I should so like just to look at her, if it's even only a moment. I'll stand so as she shan't see me. "

" Robin, she talks very wild ; it won't help you nor her, now, to see her ; better not, indeed you'd better not ; " but he continued to plead so hard, that the mother could not deny him longer.

He stood just where he could see her and she not see him. Any one who had observed him narrowly, would have seen what it cost him to stand there, watching her ; but when, in piteous accents, she said, " Robin, I did so love you ; no one ever will love you as I have ; I will tell you so, if you come here ; but your wife mustn't hear or see me—your wife!—your wife!—Robin's wife! " he seemed struck, as by a mighty blow ; he started violently, and

then, clasping his hands tightly above his head, he rushed out of the room.

Mrs. Winter followed him, for she was terrified at his sudden change. He turned and seized her hand, and, in a voice so altered by emotion that she could hardly recognise it, he said :

“I have committed a sin—how fearfully I am being punished for it only God knows ; but I would have you to know, and tell *her* so if she lives, I never knew I was aught to her than a friend. How could I think a blooming little creature like her could love such a man as me, well nigh old enough to be her father. I loved her—tell her this, too—like my life. I’d have given my heart’s blood for her. I loved her too well to ask her to be my wife ; for I thought, poor little soul, she might, out o’ kindness like, have said Yes, and then have pined away like a poor little caged bird in my dull home. Then one came and told me she was going to London, and that it was because Will Herrick was there,

and that she had talked in a light way of going there altogether. He never met me after she was gone, but he'd some tale to tell me of her, and I listened and believed; and then I married, Mrs. Winter, married in a sort of desperation—not with that holy love in my heart without which no man should dare to take that oath before his God, and I am suffering as I ought to suffer,” and poor Robin laid his head down on his folded hands, and sobbed as it is painful, aye, and fearful, too, to see a man sob.

Mrs. Winter was not possessed of much eloquence. She was very sorry for Robin, very wretched about her child. She saw at once, when she first heard her poor child's raving, what was the state of affairs; but she knew that it could not be helped. It was an evil to be borne, and she meant to bear it as the poor bear most evils, patiently. She could only cry in sympathy with Robin, and take his hand kindly, and tell him she was very sorry. At length he rose, and apologised for keeping her

so long, begged her to let him know if he could serve her at any time, and then left the cottage, with bowed head and trembling step, like a man double his age.

He tried to compose himself before he reached his own home. His great hope was that his wife's brother Daniel would be gone before he got home, or that he should not meet him, for Robin, though a peaceful man, felt as though he should knock him down.

His wife was alone when he went in, and had supper ready for him; the room in perfect order, and herself scrupulously clean; everything looking the perfection of neatness and comfort. What a relief poor Robin would have thought it, if he could have found fault with anything. Daniel had not been, and she did not expect him; there was some special meeting at his chapel. So they sat down to their meal, Robin eating little and saying less; but his want of appetite and his silence produced no visible effect on his wife; she ate her

own supper, and, when they had both finished, cleared it away quietly and without remark; presently she said in her quiet drawling voice:

“To-morrow is the Sabbath, Robin; do you wish me to go to church, or may I go to chapel?”

“To chapel, woman, no. How did you dare to think I would let any soul in my house go to chapel, much more my wife;” he exclaimed in a voice of thunder. The poor weak woman seemed to quail at the sound; he had never spoken so to her before; but she made no answer, save a low sigh.

“Did you not promise to love and obey me, and understand I will be obeyed,” he continued, still in a loud and angry tone; but as he uttered the words of the marriage vow, a new thought seemed to strike him; he rose out of his chair, and spoke in a voice so changed that it startled her to hear him.

“Anne, forgive me; I spoke a little roughly. I would rather you did not go to chapel; but I

will not control you, my poor girl. Act according to your conscience; and I will pray God to send you light."

"I wish I was sure what was right, and I wish we both thought alike, I'm sure, Robin; but really Daniel do say such awful things, it quite terrifies me."

"I can't explain to you, Anne, for I'm no scholar; but I've a inward feeling which tells me that the Church is right, that from the beginning there was folks set apart for God's service, and places of worship set apart for God's service; and, therefore, I can never feel it right for any man to get up in any kind of building, and preach and expound, and call himself a parson when he ain't one. There's a kind of look in the very Church itself which seems to say, I'm right, as it stands there so majestic-like, looking down with a sort of grand pity on that little sneaking chapel; why what would our village look like without that beautiful dear old church, I wonder? No, no, Anne, you're

all wrong, depend on it; and please God you'll live to see it; but I won't be hard on you, we've joined ourselves together, and we must bear and forbear. If I try to please you, why I shall hope that you'll try to please me, and, above all, Anne, keep Daniel from meddling with me, for that I can't stand. And now I'm tired and weary so we'll off to bed."

Anne took the candle, and followed her husband up stairs without another word.

But little sleep visited poor Robin's eyes that night; ever before him he saw that poor flushed face with the long hair streaming on the pillow, and heard that wailing sound, "I do love you, Robin."

Oh! how he wished again and again, that he had been true to himself; that he had treasured that love deep down in his heart, till some occasion like the present had shewn him it was returned; then what a happy lot would have been his. Now he was tied for life to one whom he could never love, but whom he

was told and believed loved him, which, to his kindly nature, increased the pain of his situation. How much mischief may one evil person do in the world, one tongue not well bridled, what misery may it create. Daniel Pryor loved to hear himself talk. He thought he talked well, and that whatever he said must convince his hearers. He had never found any one so difficult to deal with as Robin; and, as many a time Robin had managed to turn a laugh against Daniel when they had been in company together, he owed him a grudge, which he meant some day to repay him.

An opportunity soon offered itself. He was clever and crafty, and very observing; and he discovered Robin's secret—his love for the pretty Phœbe. Phœbe, herself, had very much snubbed Daniel, and distinctly refused his attentions; and he was determined, if he could help it, that she should not marry the man he hated the worst in the world.

His schemes were aided, as the plans of bad

men frequently are in *this* world, by the fact that Daniel's sister Anne had fallen in love with Robin. To make him acquainted with this fact, and cunningly to paint how an unrequited love frequently caused the death of the sufferer, was his first care. Then to give Robin such an impression of Phœbe as to make him feel her unworthy of his love, was his next effort; and, unhappily for Robin, his success was complete. Though, as he said, he would not ask Phœbe to be his wife for fear she should not be happy, still he could not bear to find her unworthy of the devotion he had always felt for her. His faith in what was good, lovely, and of good report was gone; he was wretched and lonely, and his mind turned for comfort to her whom he was told loved him, the quiet, grave, precise Anne Pryor.

What a contrast to the little idol whom he had so long enshrined in his heart! What a contrast—that simple, plain, unadorned dress of some dingy, undecided colour, with the

bright print and knowing little cherry-coloured bow fastening the collar round the full white throat of lovely little Phœbe. What a contrast, that quiet, cold, inexpressive face, to the bright, joyous, blooming little beauty; the measured words and low drawling tone, with the quick speech, and ready answer, and clear, ringing voice, which, to Robin, had always sounded like the sweetest music; but Anne loved him, and would be happy in his dull home. Phœbe's heart was set on gaiety and frivolity; and all the pleasant things she had said to him, which he had treasured in his memory, and which had recurred to him in many a lonely hour, were only idle words, which she would have said to any one. Thus had the poison, so cunningly given, taken its effect; and Robin Dale married Anne Pryor.

All her family were rigid dissenters; but she had been in service for some years at the Vicarage, where, of course, the household attended Church; and being one of those beings

who have no wills or opinions of their own, she did as they did ; and now that she was Robin's wife, would quietly have continued the same course, had it not been for her brother Daniel, who, with strange persistent malignity, endeavoured to make miserable the union he had himself brought about. He knew Robin's strict adherence to the Church ; and rightly calculated that his wife's differing with him on such a point would make his home wretched. Poor Robin ! his cup of bitterness was very full ; it needed but this new-found knowledge that he had cast away the only love he cared for, to make it run over. Anne, however, did really love her husband as far as her passive nature would admit of ; and so the next morning, in spite of her brother's "awful" sayings, she went to Church.

CHAP. XII.

Good Counsel.

“WHO were that tall, sedate-looking woman and very handsome man who sat near us?” asked Agnes, as they were walking home from Church.

“I don’t know, I’m sure,” answered Edward. “I’m not acquainted with half the stupid people in this place. Minnie knows, I dare say.”

“You mean Robin Dale and his wife. I think, Agnes, he is one of the handsomest men of his class I have ever seen. It is such a noble face,” answered Minnie. “There’s a report in the village, I understand, that poor Phœbe is dying for love of him. How true it is, I know not; but she had some mysterious secret, I know, that weighed on her mind, certainly.”

"And made 'a canker on her velvet cheek.' What the dickens is it that somebody says?" said Edward.

"The quotation is less remarkable for its correctness than its aptitude," said Agnes, laughing. "However, I am very sorry for poor Phœbe; though I am half inclined to argue, with the same author you quote, that dying for love is not one of the modes of carrying off the surplus population."

"Oh! Agnes; I believe that many die for love," said Minnie, earnestly.

"Did you ever know one?" asked Agnes.

"No; I have never known one myself."

"Did any of your friends ever know one?"

"Not that I am aware of, certainly."

"No; I think it would be difficult to find a case."

"In short, you think it a very bad complaint, but soon over—leaving no ill effects behind; is not that it, Miss Hay?" said Edward.

"Something of that sort," answered Agnes, laughing.

"The best cure I've heard is matrimony," said Woodford.

"You do not say so, from personal experience, Edward, do you?" said Minnie, looking up fondly in his face.

"Well! I don't know, Minnie. I haven't quite made up my mind."

Minnie made no answer, but joined no more in the conversation, which Agnes and her husband kept up very briskly, until they reached home, when she went immediately to the nursery, and appeared no more till luncheon was announced.

"Do you 'do' Church again in the afternoon?" said Edward, yawning, and flinging himself down on a sofa, as soon as he had finished his luncheon.

"I am going again," said Agnes, "if you mean me; and Mrs. Woodford is coming, too, I think; are you not, Minnie?"

Minnie had taken up a book, and had not heard her husband's question.

"To Church—oh! yes, dear Agnes."

"You will come with us, Mr. Woodford, will you not?"

"If Miss Hay commands me, certainly."

"I am not your commanding officer, Mr. Woodford, and should not, therefore, think of giving you orders."

"But, would you wish me to go then?"

"Certainly; can you doubt it?" answered Agnes, gaily.

"Very well, then, I will; somebody else wishes it too, a little, I think; but, what makes you look so serious, little woman, eh?"

"I was thinking," said Minnie, "just then."

"Then leave off thinking, for its not becoming," he said, rather abruptly.

Minnie did not reply, but returned to her book; and soon left the room, to prepare for Church.

"You look serious now, Miss Hay; what is it? I suppose you do not understand my fun and 'chaff,' as the boys say, any more than Minnie does."

"I don't understand your thinking it fun, if it worries her, I must admit."

"But she is so absurdly sensitive."

"She loves you very much," answered Agnes.

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure so."

"But this country life is so odious—so dull—so dreary, I'm obliged to bully poor Minnie, for something to do."

"I thought any intelligent person could find something to do, anywhere."

"You're severe, Miss Hay, as usual."

"I hope not—I do not wish to be; but Mrs. Woodford is so gentle and so loving, that it seems quite barbarity to cause her needless pain, for a moment."

"Well, she is a good little girl; but she is always the same."

"Yes, always gentle, unselfish, and sweet-tempered."

"Well, I do not know about unselfish, when

she dragged me into the country, knowing I hated it."

"Oh! Mr. Woodford; do you not remember making a virtue of it to me," said Agnes, smiling; "saying that you had taken a house in the country to please your wife, and make her happy?"

"Well; if I had been sure it would have made me so confoundedly miserable, I don't think I should have done it."

The Church bells, giving warning that they had not much more time, if they intended going to the afternoon service, stopped further conversation, and Agnes ran off to get ready; but she noticed, with agreeable surprise, that, for the rest of the day, Edward was most kind and tender to his wife, and poor Minnie's happy, loving smile (easily chased or called back by a word from her husband) was again lighting her face.

The next morning, after breakfast, Edward came in, after having paid his usual visit to the

rectory, with the news, that Rose Hill had been let for a twelvemonth, by the people who had so recently occupied it; they were going abroad with one of the daughters, who was ill, and he bade the ladies guess who had taken it; of course, they made a great many futile attempts, and then he said,—

“Prepare for astonishment. I was sure you would never guess. The Harrowbys! Young Harrowby is coming to be curate to my uncle. Now what do you give me for such news as that? It’s worth sixpence a word in this deadly-lively place.”

“It certainly is a piece of news,” said Minnie. “We shall have a beauty in Grassdale now.”

“Not an enviable neighbour, I fear,” said Agnes.

“No; you and I settled that, did we not, Agnes?” said Minnie, smiling. “I am afraid she is not a great favourite with either of us.”

“Jealous—jealous evidently,” said Edward.

"That must be it," answered Agnes. "I like things accounted for. But now tell us, when do they come?"

"In a day or two, I understand. My uncle wants us to dine and meet them on their arrival; and my mother will stay, on purpose to be present on the important occasion.

"Dear me, there's baby crying again," said Minnie, rising; "I am sure Jane manages her badly."

"Oh! bother the brat; let it cry, it will strengthen its lungs. Don't go, Minnie; the moment one begins to talk to you, that everlasting squalling takes you away."

"Poor little thing, Edward, I must go and see after her."

"Shall I go, Mrs. Woodford?" said Agnes.

"No thank you, dear; I'd rather go myself." And Minnie left the room.

"What a horrid nuisance that little animal is. What a fine thing it would be if one could serve children like kittens, put them in a pail with a mop on them."

"Excellent; but unhappily the law of the land does not allow it," said Agnes, smiling; "and in this case, I think it would be a pity in an artistic point of view; for there is no prettier sight than to see your lovely wife with that baby in her arms. She is as devoted a mother as she is a wife."

"What do you expect for that, Miss Hay?"

"Nothing but your concurrence. A mother's love is the most beautiful thing in the world—the only unselfish love. How tiresome, cross, ugly, ill, or disagreeable a child may be, its mother loves it and cares for it, and is never weary of it. Men, who occasionally, in the course of the day, hear its cry, call it a nuisance, forgetting that the mother, perhaps, hears that all day, and on her devolves the duty of seeing why it cries, and endeavouring to remove the cause. How much more of a 'nuisance' would it be for her, but for her patient, enduring, unselfish love."

"But when a man has to pay a nurse, I don't

see what his wife must be bothering about the baby for."

"Because its cry of sorrow or discomfort goes to her heart; and her duty as well as her privilege is to soothe and comfort it. For what hand or voice can soothe it like its mother's. Men should remember, I think, that love for them is shown in a woman's devotion to her children as much as in any other way. The more a woman loves her husband the more she will love her children, because they are his. Amongst her little group, which is most likely to be the dearest? The one most like its father; and in no way can the husband show his love to his wife better, than by caring for and showing an interest, in those little things who are so dear to her, and lightening, as far as possible, her care and anxiety for them. But, how I am preaching, Mr. Woodford; you will be offering to recommend me, as a change, to the Rev. Ebenezer Stumps, at the chapel, presently, I fear."

"You are talking very kindly, Miss Hay. Had I known you earlier, I might have been wiser and better than I am," said Edward, very gravely, more gravely than she had ever heard him speak before ; "but you know I had not much of a chance when I was young. I don't remember ever having to consider any one but myself ; and I don't think I understand it. I've always been accustomed to get away from anything that bored me ; and I dare say you think I'm a horrid bad lot."

"Indeed, I do not ; I think you try to make yourself appear so, sometimes."

Just at this moment the door opened, and Minnie re-entered. Edward rose, and, going to her, said,—

"Well, darling ; I hope there's nothing the matter with baby."

Minnie looked up in his face with glad surprise, as she answered,—

"No, nothing, thank you, dearest ; but Jane is a clumsy nurse. She was quiet directly I took her—bless her !"

"Well, you'd better see about getting another nurse; perhaps little Phœbe will get well, and she'll do; she was rather a credit to the establishment. You never saw our little maid, did you, Miss Hay?"

"No;—but I have heard Mrs. Woodford speak of her often. I am going to see her, when she's able to be seen."

"You'll see a perfect little beauty, I can tell you. Well, I shall go out—take the horse out a bit, I think; good bye, Pet. Take care of her, Miss Hay."

The moment he was gone, Minnie went up to Agnes, and kissed her.

"Dear Agnes, this is your doing—you have been talking to Edward."

"What is my doing; what do you mean?" said Agnes, smiling, as she returned her kiss.

"Oh! I know quite well that you have said something to Edward about speaking so unkindly of baby. Anything you say, he thinks so much of. I am sure I can never be thankful

enough that we made your acquaintance ; you exercise such a good influence over him. I love him, God knows, dearly,—but I am not clever, and I cannot talk to him, and make him see things as he ought. I only feel hurt and silly when he says things to vex me ; but I do not know how to make him act differently. Now, you manage so well ; you let him see where he is wrong, and yet never anger him, in so doing. I can only love him, faults and all.”

“ Dear, sweet Minnie,” said Agnes, warmly ; “ what can a wife do better ? I do sometimes talk to him, perhaps, too impertinently ; but, he is so kind-hearted and good-tempered, that he does not appear to mind it,—because I see that his manner pains you, and it might cause you both to be unhappy ; but, I am sure, a few more years of married life, with your untiring, gentle love, must make him all you wish him.”

“ I hope so ; but, Agnes, there are graver

faults than mere manner, that I have discovered—which grieve me sadly.”

“Patience, dear, that will all come right.”

“I am surprised at nothing, since I have seen Mrs. Woodford,” said Minnie. “I have heard her, even before Mr. Bellamy, talk in such a very light, irreverent way, of sacred things, that I feel sure my poor dear Edward has never been taught better; and the worst of it is, I do not know how to teach him.”

“Example is better than precept,” said Agnes; “he will do as you do, to please you, first; and you will then find the higher feeling will follow.”

“But, Agnes, I am very weak; and when he laughs, and makes game of what I do, I give it up. Several times I have given up the second service, because he has laughed at me.”

“I would strive against that, certainly; because I feel almost sure, from what little I know of your husband, that he would highly respect a ‘principle,’ and be led by those who adhered to one.”

“Yes, I feel that—and have always regretted it afterwards; but I like to please him, if I can. I wish you were going to live always with us: you would do us both good. How did you learn to be so wise?”

“Minnie, dear, you’ll spoil me, if you say such flattering things. Wise, indeed! I am afraid I can lay very little claim to wisdom; but I have seen, for my age, a great deal of the world; and it has always been a great amusement to me, to watch people’s characters—and I have begun to think that every one would be better than they are, if their peculiarities were more studied by the people they live amongst, and their prejudices more respected. Many an irritable, angry word, leading too often to worse, might be avoided by this means, and homes, which are now miserable, be bright with love and content. I often think of my dear mother’s favourite proverb, ‘Do not measure other people’s corn in your bushel.’ We are all too apt to do so.”

“ Very true ; I believe there are few cases of unhappy marriages without it being the fault of both the parties. I must learn to be less sensitive, and then, I daresay, Edward will leave off teasing me.”

“ Or you will cease to think it teasing, which will be much the same ; will it not ? But now, shall we not go for a walk ; and may not darling baby come too ? ”

“ Yes, certainly. I shall be ready in five minutes, and will tell Jane to get herself and baby ready.”

CHAP. XIII.

A Snake in the Grass.

ON the following Saturday, the Harrowbys were to arrive to take possession of Briarly Hill, and on Sunday young Harrowby was to do duty in the parish church.

"I must go and hear the fellow," said Edward, at breakfast-time. "But really it will seem rather ridiculous, when I think of the tandem and cigar days."

"I do not see that," said Agnes. "He was not in orders then; and, therefore, there could be no possible harm in his amusing himself in that way. With his change of views came change of pursuits; and so that he is not hard upon or illiberal towards those who amuse

themselves as he once did, I can't think why he should seem ridiculous."

"Dear me, Miss Hay, what a warm advocate he has."

"Not him, individually, Mr. Woodford;" said Agnes, laughing and blushing; "but his class generally. I have so often heard that remark made about young clergymen, and I never could see the justice of it. If they look very serious and sanctified, and profess a rigid horror and disgust for any one who ever indulges in youthful folly, refusing to have recalled to them those days in which they shared in such amusement, they would then, I think, be ridiculous; but if, on the contrary, they are ready to smile at old recollections, and though having seen the folly of it all, and learnt to value the good and useful life they are leading, they can be gentle and lenient towards those who have *not* seen the folly of it, I think it is a pleasant sight to see, and one which true friends would like to witness. And

now, having preached that sermon, I will put my bonnet on, and go and hear if Mr. Harrowby can beat it."

Edward made some laughing reply, which Agnes did not hear as she closed the door. He went to church; waited for Harrowby as he came out, shook hands warmly with him and complimented him on his sermon, introduced him to his wife and said, that they should do themselves the pleasure of calling on his mother and sister in the morning.

The dinner-party at the Vicarage took place the next day; and Edward declared it was quite a treat to do anything in the party line again. Minnie felt an unusual interest in dining at a party there; for the last time she had done so she had first met Edward, for this or some other reason she was in unusual spirits, and looked her loveliest. Her husband was delighted with her, which added not a little to her bright smile and joyous look.

The dinner passed over like all such affairs;

with conversation amongst the men about the crops, sporting, and politics, with an occasional condescending remark to the lady next them respecting books or the opera, or something suitable, as they thought, to their comprehension. The usual amount of eating and drinking, and sitting over dessert; the little half bow and smile from the lady at the top of the table, when she perceived that the other ladies had their gloves on, and then the adjourning to the drawing-room, and the *very* small talk that ensues. Mrs. Woodford ensconced herself by Minnie and began to make many inquiries about "the precious child," but as her eyes continually wandered to other parts of the room, and she said "Yes" and "No" in the wrong places, it would have been evident, to a meaner observation than Minnie's, that she was not interested in her subject.

Miss Harrowby took up a stereoscope and looked at the views, speaking to no one. And Agnes, Mrs. Harrowby, and two very meek

young ladies talked together; but Minnie could see poor Agnes was unutterably bored, and kept continually yawning behind her fan. At length the gentlemen appeared, and Agnes gave a sigh of relief. Edward came up to her directly.

"Well, Miss Hay, how have you been able to exist for three mortal hours without having me to scold?"

"Very badly. I have been utterly at a loss for an occupation. Do, do something wrong at once, to give me a chance."

"I really can't oblige you, I feel so very good; and Minnie looks too charming to bully. Did you ever see the little woman look better; there goes my old uncle to sit beside her, he is so fond of her. You know this is where I met her for the first time."

"Yes; so she has told me; dear little creature, she does indeed look bright and beautiful to-night, as though she was determined to keep up the good impression she

first made here. I think the beauty is not at all in force to-night, she looks paler and colder than ever."

"Yes; she's not one of my sort; but still she's handsome, there's no question. Is there not something mysterious between her and Ferrars?"

A crimson flush mounted to Agnes's temples as she answered shortly:

"Why do you think so?"

"They seemed strange together, that's all. But I don't wish to pump you. Don't look so alarmed."

"I am not in the least alarmed," said Agnes, quickly recovering her composure; "because to 'pump me' would require more than even your ingenuity, I flatter myself."

"Well, I don't know that, if I meant to try; but I have not the least intention. Ferrars and I are very old friends; and he would tell me anything he meant to be known, I'm sure; and I would not wish to know anything he did not.

He's a first-rate fellow ; I don't believe there's his match in the world. I should hate any one who used him ill ; but he's quite able to take his own part, and will come well and bravely out of everything. He'll take very good care no one shall know he's unhappy : in short, he carries it to an absurd extreme. It's one of his peculiarities. He'll never make a confidant of any one, unless it might be his wife, or the person he means to make so. I've heard him say so."

Oh ! that beautiful camelia ; every petal has been pulled from it, and they are lying at Agnes's feet. Some one speaking to Woodford called him from his place, and little did either he or Agnes know that the blushes, the pulling to pieces of the flower, the pleasant smile which had first greeted his entrance into the room, had all been closely remarked. Minnie had been asked to sing ; Edward had been called to get her music. At the conclusion of her song, when she returned to her seat, a low and very sweet voice addressed her, saying :

"What a very beautiful ballad, Mrs. Woodford; and how perfectly rendered."

She looked up; it was Miss Harrowby.

"I am glad you like it; I am very fond of it. It was composed by a friend of mine."

"It is quite the wail of a broken heart. I wonder how you, who look so bright, can sing it with such expression. I should have thought that you could not sympathise, from want of personal experience, with anything like sorrow."

"I do not know that I quite believe in broken hearts; but still I can quite understand a regret for 'those bright days' when Fancy's fairy fingers made the future seem so bright. The realities of life are very different to what we picture them when we are very young."

"Even you have found that out, then. I should have thought you had got to learn it. Miss Hay is staying with you, is she not?" continued Miss Harrowby, somewhat suddenly changing the conversation.

"Yes; she has been with us some time."

"She is a very old friend of your husband's; he has known her from a child, has he not?"

"Oh, no! He knew her from meeting her at Moorlands, that is all."

"Indeed! I fancied, from their manner, that they were very old friends; but Miss Hay has a knack of appearing on intimate terms with any one."

"It is difficult for any one to be long a stranger with my husband," said Minnie, looking up, with her bright; innocent, happy smile, in her interrogator's face. It was so bright and innocent, that glance, that it was strange that the self-possessed Miss Harrowby should quail under it; but she did, and, for some excuse, moved away to the opposite side of the room; and Minnie gave a slight shiver, as though a cold wind had passed over her.

Agnes Hay was next asked to sing. She good-humouredly assented directly; but she was no musician, and only sang, as she said,

to amuse herself, for she loved music, as she loved everything that was good and beautiful. So she sang a little bright Jacobite song with spirit and zest, and, leaving the piano directly, she turned to Miss Harrowby, and said :

“ Will you not sing now ? ”

“ I could not presume, after Miss Hay,” she answered.

Of course Agnes was perfectly aware she did not mean that ; so she answered, laughingly,

“ I will restrain my musical ardour and knowledge, and be very lenient, Miss Harrowby, if you will sing.”

“ Oh ! yes, pray do,” said Edward, who, during Agnes’ song, had been standing to hear her ; “ it is such a treat to hear you.”

“ Thank you ; you must excuse me to-night,” said Miss Harrowby ; “ I really am not in the vein.”

Mrs. Harrowby’s carriage being announced, prevented further remark ; and, after Edward had chatted a little with his mother, and heard

that his father was coming down to fetch her home, on Wednesday, they, too, left, and the party broke up.

"I like young Harrowby so much better than his sister," said Minnie, at breakfast, next morning.

"Oh! yes, he's a good fellow, enough. I had a very nice talk with him last night, and told him, now he had come into the parish, he must keep me in order: not that I think he'll do that as well as Miss Hay—eh, Minnie?"

"No; she manages you, capitally; but, I expect, she finds her hands full,—don't you, Agnes?"

"Oh! he's pretty good, considering."

"On the mend, evidently; and that's encouraging, is it not?"

"Decidedly."

"You were a dear, good boy, this morning," said Minnie, rising, and going to him, and parting the hair on his forehead, on which she imprinted a most loving kiss.

"Was I! What did I do?"

"Went into the nursery, and kissed baby."

"How do you know I did?"

"Agnes told me—she was there; she saw you kiss the darling."

"Oh! pooh! You're both geese—go, and finish your breakfast."

"I have finished; and when you have, Agnes, dear, I shall be glad of your company up the village. I am going to see poor Phoebe—don't hurry, because I've the dinner to order, and all that interesting work. You see, I don't treat you like a stranger, and wait till you've finished."

"I should hope not, dear Mrs. Woodford."

"I beg to say, I have not half done; now, don't run off with the sugar, Minnie," said Edward, pulling her back.

"I am not going, you foolish boy, to touch the sugar. Agnes will pour out your other cup; the fact is, you've been reading that stupid newspaper, instead of eating your breakfast."

"Stupid newspaper, indeed; I would rather go without my breakfast than my paper."

"I know—all you silly men can't give your opinion about anything, till you've read your newspaper, to see what that says," and, so saying, Minnie escaped, as quickly as she could, expecting to be punished for her last remark.

"Ah! I'll pay her out, by-and-bye. I'll trouble you for another cup of coffee, Miss Hay. What made you tell her I kissed the baby?"

"Because I knew it would please her; and, you see, it did."

"She's easily pleased, then, I'm sure."

"Exactly; that is the beauty of her disposition. She is so loving, that, to love her in return, and, what is still dearer than herself, her child, is all she requires to make her happy."

"I wish she required a London life to make her happy; for I never shall stand this, it's so

awfully dull. I mean to go off with my father and mother, for a day or two, on Wednesday; but I haven't told Minnie yet; you will be here—I wouldn't leave her alone, poor little thing."

"Yes, I shall be here next Wednesday; but my time will be up on the following Wednesday."

"Will it? Oh! what a nuisance. I don't know how we shall get on without you; I shall get rough and cross again, and all will go wrong."

"I am not afraid of that," said Agnes, smiling; "but, have you finished breakfast; Minnie will be waiting for us."

"Yes, all right. I don't mind a walk up the village, with you; I'm sure I've nothing else to do."

"Do come; a good walk will shake off the blues, which you certainly seem to have."

"No mistake about it; never get married, Miss Hay—it does n't answer."

"I can't make any promises, Mr. Woodford; I shall wait till I'm asked—that's one thing," and, so saying, Agnes ran off to get ready.

Minnie was, of course, delighted to find her husband was going with them.

It was a bright sunny morning, with a slight white frost, feeling so fresh and healthful—and, on Edward's arm, down the green lanes she loved so dearly, Minnie walked along, happier, and prouder than a queen. In one of these pretty shady lanes was Mrs. Winter's cottage.

"I think we will not all go in," said Minnie; "because perhaps it will be too many, if Phœbe happens to be down stairs."

"Now, you see, that's because she's such a pretty girl, Minnie won't let me go in, Miss Hay."

"Of course, that's the reason. Hush! here's Mrs. Winter," said Minnie, as the cottage door opened, and Phœbe's mother appeared, curtseying to her visitors.

"I seed you coming, ma'am," she said, "and I thought, maybe, you was coming to call; won't the other lady and gentleman come in?"

"No, thank you, Mrs. Winter; they will wait outside for me;" and Minnie entered the cottage.

Propped up with bed pillows, in an arm-chair, sat poor Phœbe, white as death; her beautiful hair cut close round her head. No one would hardly have recognised the once blooming little beauty. She had not strength to rise on Minnie's entrance; but the latter went kindly to her, and said:

"Don't disturb yourself, my poor girl. How are you? Getting on well, I hope."

"Much better, Ma'am, thank you. I hope I shall soon be well; but I've lost my place in London; they would'nt wait for me."

"There that's what frets her so, Ma'am," said her mother; "and I keep on telling her she ain't got no call to worret about that. Wait

till she's got strong again. She'll soon get another place."

"To be sure, Phœbe. I won't forget you. I've no doubt I shall soon get you another situation."

"In London, Ma'am?"

"Well, I do not know about London; but are you still so desirous to live in London?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"It was there you got ill, was it not?"

"I think I'd rather too hard a place, ma'am; but if it pleases God to give me back my health I could get on in a light place."

"Well, we will see about it, Phœbe; but you must not worry yourself about service now; you must do your best to get well; that is your first duty. Did you like your jelly?"

"Very much indeed, thank you, ma'am."

"You shall have some more. Cook is going to bring you a little soup, which I think you will fancy, after our dinner."

"You are very kind. I'm a great trouble

to every one ;” and the large tears welled up into her eyes as she spoke.

“Not at all, Phœbe ; you must not think that. I am sure you are very patient ; and you know if there were no sick persons in the world, we should not have some of our best and gentlest feelings exercised. Depend on it, even the most helpless invalids have their mission in this world, and are not useless, as they think themselves. My mother has been to see you, I suppose?”

“O yes, ma'am. I don't know what I should have done, or mother either, without her ; she has been so good.”

“That's well. God always raises us up friends when we need them ; does He not ? Well, I must be going now. I have brought you some grapes ; they were sent to me, and I thought you would enjoy them.”

Phœbe's eyes quite sparkled at the tempting-looking fruit, as she heartily thanked Minnie ; and, after some little more conversation, she

took her leave, and went to seek Edward and Agnes, who had strolled some distance up the lane. She paused, as she could not see them when she came out of the cottage; but a figure was advancing towards her, and on a nearer approach it proved to be Miss Harrowby. After the usual greetings, she said—

“Your husband and Miss Hay are in front, in that meadow to the left; they were too much engaged to see me.”

“Indeed! What a good Agnes, to fulfil my instructions so well. I wanted Edward amused whilst I went into a cottage, or else he gets so very impatient.”

“She has succeeded admirably, I assure you; at least, to all appearance.”

“Then I will wish you good bye, and not try my husband’s patience any longer,” said Minnie, “as he has been so good;” and shaking hands with Miss Harrowby, she wished her good bye and went on her way down the lane, with the same happy smile resting on her

lips which had been there all day, and no quicker step.

Miss Harrowby looked after her, and murmuring, "Little fool!" she, too, walked on.

CHAP. XIV.

Robin in Trouble.

MRS. WINTER had, with true delicacy, never mentioned to Phoebe the discovery of her secret; but of course she was at no loss to imagine why she was so desirous to leave Grassdale as soon as possible. She evidently dreaded seeing Robin; and, since her recovery, she had never mentioned his name. The evening of the day on which Minnie had been to see her, Robin, who was very desirous to know how she was, as he had not heard for some days, thought he would walk up and enquire—what could be the harm? He had always gone there before his marriage, and the sad secret lay only between him and her mother, it was much better for

him to go as usual; but his heart beat violently as he tapped at the door, and he felt as though he could scarcely stand there till it was answered. He had to knock again, for no one came; again he waited, and finding still that his knock was unheeded, he concluded that Mrs. Winter was out in the garden, and did not hear him, and so he opened the door as he had often done before.

Phœbe had waited in hopes of her mother, who was only gone to a neighbour's for a moment, returning, and at last was trying to walk to the door to answer the knock; but when it opened, and she saw Robin, she gave a sharp cry and fell back in her chair, covering her face with her hands.

Robin stood as though transfixed for a moment, and then said, in a low and agitated voice.

"Phœbe, Phœbe, I did not know you were here, indeed; I thought you were up stairs. I'll go again directly."

With a great effort Phœbe recovered herself, and said—

“I am weak and easily startled, it is nothing; my mother will be here directly. Will you sit down; you had better.”

“No thank you, Phœbe; I only came to ask how you did, I will go now. It seems very long since we met.”

Ah! Robin, why did you say that. He scarcely knew; why he stayed to say another word he knew not, save that he seemed irresistably impelled. With her lost beauty, her look of weakness and suffering, she seemed dearer to him than ever. She looked up in his face as he spoke the words, and had he not known her secret before, he must have known it then; did she read his, or was it the memory of their last meeting in the lanes, which overpowered her? At any rate she gave a low moan and fell back in a dead faint. Robin flew to her, and in an agony of tears, called her by every endearing name. While he still held her hand

kneeling beside her, the door which he had left, again opened wider, and he heard a wiry drawling voice say, "Oh ! I beg your pardon, I'm sure ; I only called to ask how Phœbe was." Before Robin could answer the door was closed again ; and at the same moment Mrs. Winter entered at the back door. Terribly alarmed to see her daughter in such a state, in her fright, she pushed Robin roughly away, and scolded him harshly for coming at all, desiring him to go at once, before her daughter recovered her consciousness ; and so poor Robin left the place, saying no word in his own defence ; for he felt it would have been better had he not gone near the cottage. He wandered about the lanes some time, though it was growing dark and cold, for he could not make up his mind to go home. What could have possessed Daniel to come to Mrs. Winter's cottage ? He did not know that he had ever been there before ; had he watched him in there ? and if so, for what purpose ? to make

mischievous at home, he doubted not. Certainly circumstances were against him; but surely his wife, who loved him, would believe the truth. At any rate it was best to face it out; and so, with this determination, Robin at last turned round and walked quickly home. As he suspected Daniel was there before him.

"Well, you've got back, Robin," he said; "how did you leave the poor creature?"

"Much the same, I thank you, Daniel. Anne, I've been to see poor Phoebe Winter."

"So I hear, Robin," was all her answer.

"Ah!" said Daniel, rubbing his knees and raising his eyes to the ceiling, as was his wont. "She'll long rue that journey to London, if all I hear be true."

"What do you mean?" said Robin, fiercely.

"What I say, Robin. She ain't the first gal by a great many that has lived to rue going to that den of iniquity. She'll never be able again to look down on her neighbours as she

used to do! Dear me! sad thing; such a respectable woman as her mother, too."

"What do you mean?" again asked Robin, in a loud tone. "Do you dare to sit there in my house, and say a word against the character of that innocent girl. Repeat it, if you dare, Daniel, and I'll force the lie down your throat."

"Don't be violent, Robin, don't. I can't see what you should want to take the gal's part for, I'm sure; and I'm only saying what I've heard. May be it ain't true: I'm sure I hope it's not."

"Then don't repeat it till you *are* sure it's true—do you hear?—or it may be you'll rue the day you dared to slander an honest woman's child. And now I think I'll wish you good night. It's time we parted, Daniel; we'd better whilst we're friends."

"Daniel's had no supper, Robin; we've been waiting for you."

"Let him sup at home to-night; I'm in no mood for company. Good night, Daniel."

" Oh, good night ! Of course I'll go. Never mind, Anne ; don't fret. Praise the Lord, I've got a supper at home to go to. I hope, Robin, you'll strive with the evil one, and master your temper. I forgive you ; the Lord knows I forgive you. Good night, Robin ; good night, Anne. Have patience, my poor girl ; you're sadly tried. Dear, dear, dear ; the wickedness of this world !" And so continuing to mutter, Daniel Pryor shuffled out of the house.

Robin sat in moody silence, staring into the fire. At length Anne said :

" Your supper's ready, Robin, if you've a mind to come to it. I suppose Phoebe Winter did not give you supper. I don't know as it looks very well for a married man to be kneeling down beside and holding the hand of a young girl, instead of coming home to your own wife. It's well, I think, only Daniel saw you. I'm sure I've always been a true and loving wife to you ; making your home comfortable, and bearing all your strange ways and

rough sayings without a word, sitting here alone at home many an hour without grumbling; but if I know, whilst I sit alone, you are gone to see them as, by all accounts, is no better than they should be, then—" She paused, for Robin had risen from his chair and come close to her, and the strange expression of his face, with its livid pallor, terrified her. He laid his hand on her arm with a grip so firm that it almost pained her, as he said,

"Anne, hear me for the first and last time that this subject must ever be named between us. Perfect confidence between us as man and wife is best and right, Anne. I have known that poor girl since she stood at my knee a little golden-haired child. I loved her then as I might love a little child of my own. She grew up good and comely and bright like the sunshine, and like the sunshine, she seemed to make my heart glad when I looked at her. I loved her then, Anne, as I might love my sister. She went away, and it seemed as though the

sun had forgot to shine, and then I knew I loved her like my life. There's fifteen years between us, Anne, and I thought it folly to dream she could like me, or even care to be my wife. I heard (no matter from whom) evil things of her, and I heard, Anne, that you loved me. I was lonely and wretched, and I married you. 'Twas a sin, I know. I have tried to be a good husband to you : it may be I am at times a bit rough ; it's my nature. Since then, but a short time since, I've known that—that I might have made *her* my wife, that she, too, loved me. Pity her, pity us both, Anne. Believe that I honour my God and his laws too much not to be true to you ; that I am grateful for your love ; and that I will protect you, in sickness and in health, so long as we both shall live. Anne, will you trust me ?”

Poor thing ! she did love him—she was a true woman ; full of a woman's tender nature, with all her faults. In a moment her arms were flung about his neck, and she said, with

the tears running down her cheeks, which his passionate appeal had called forth,

“ I do love you—I do believe you, and I *will* trust you, Robin.”

Wretched and harassed as he felt, he could not but be comforted at this; there is a magic power in love, and Robin kissed her, more tenderly than he had ever done. He tried to coax her to eat—but she could not, neither could he—and they both went, supperless, to bed. But Robin could not sleep; he lay awake for some time, and at length he felt he must rise and go into the air; it seemed to him as though he was being smothered.

Poor Anne was sleeping peacefully, like a child; he rose gently, without disturbing her; and, hastily throwing on a few clothes, he went down stairs, and out into the road. It was quite early, lights were in many of the cottages—and, in the public-house opposite, there was a sound of singing and merriment. Robin never frequented such places, and yet, to-night, it

sounded so cheerful—should he go in for half-an-hour? Anne was in bed and asleep; she could not be dull. What evil spirit was abroad that night, to tempt him!

Robin went—several jovial fellows were there, delighted to see him; they soon made way for him; one would treat him, and another; it was such a wonder to see him there. At twelve o'clock Robin staggered home, saying, as he left the inn,

“I'm so brave, I could kill any one that offended me, easily.”

Anne was awake,—

“Where have you been, Robin; I've been so frightened about you?”

He made no answer, but was asleep in no time.

In the dead of night, when the lights were out in the cottages, and no jovial sounds came from the inn, a murdered man was carried home between two labourers, who had found him in a ditch, just outside the village.

* * * * *

"What a dreadful thing this is, about Daniel Pryor, ma'am," said Watson, when she came to dress her mistress, in the morning.

"What is it, Watson?"

"Why, ma'am, he's been murdered; and suspicion rests upon Robin Dale."

"Dear me, Watson, how dreadful; murdered!—impossible!"

"It's quite true, ma'am; but how they came to suspect Dale, I don't know, such a respectable man, as I have heard he is; but, however, he's taken up on suspicion."

"It is a dreadful thing, indeed; I suppose it's made a great sensation in the village."

"Wonderful; no one seems to talk of anything else; it's so dreadful, because he's his wife's brother."

"But, what makes them think Dale did it?"

"Why, it seems, Ma'am, he got up again, after he'd been in bed some time, and went to the Three Tuns, where he had a good deal to drink; and

it's a thing he's never been known to do before. When the men went home, who had been drinking there too, they found Daniel's dead body just outside the village. Dale went home some half-hour before them, and it was known he and Pryor had had high words that evening."

"Dear me; it is most distressing. I must go and tell your master," and Minnie hurried off into her husband's dressing-room, with the exciting news.

Poor Robin, the blow to him when the awful news of Daniel's death was first broken to him, and his consequent detention as suspected of the murder, may be better imagined than described. The fatal words he had uttered as he left the inn, partially intoxicated, and which now he could not remember saying, went fearfully against him; besides, the unusual circumstance of his drinking in a public-house at all—and the highly-respected Robin Dale, beloved by one and all, was committed for trial at the next assizes.

His wife, though, of course, very much distressed and shocked at her brother's awful and sudden end, never for a moment suspected her husband, and entirely believed his statement, that he had only gone into the Three Tuns and come straight home again ; so, with her quiet, passive nature, she bore this sad event very patiently, convinced that Robin must, in the end, be proved innocent. But, on Phoebe, the news had a different effect; equally, with Anne, convinced of Robin's innocence, she could not, like Anne, rest on the conviction and hope for a favourable result. Robin dying an ignominious death, accused of a crime he had not committed, was the fearful spectre which haunted her, night and day, and, of course, materially retarded her recovery.

CHAP. XV.

The Bracelet.

DURING this excitement in the village, the little party at the cottage went on much as usual. Edward declared that the murder had quite woke him up; it was something to think of, and talk about. He had allowed his father and mother to go to London without him, as he found Agnes had only one more week to stay, and it would be a pity to lose any of her instruction; but, he said to Minnie, when they were alone,

“ I thought you would rather I didn’t go, Pet; and so, perhaps you will go with me after Christmas, for a day or two, and take baby too.”

“ Dear Edward, that I will,” said Minnie,

cordially; "how kind and thoughtful of you; but you would not like having baby in London."

"Yes, I would, if it would make you happier there."

Minnie thanked him warmly; and, in her heart, she blessed the good influence which, she was sure, had wrought this change.

Edward had seemed happier, and less discontented, too, since the arrival of the Harrowbys; for he liked young Harrowby so much, and was a great deal with him. The parish was a very extended one, and the distances to several of the cottages so great, that Harrowby was often glad of Edward's invitation to drive him. Occasionally he would go into the cottages with him, and his excessive kindness to the poor raised him very much in Edward's estimation; he could not but contrast his own idle, purposeless existence with Harrowby's earnest, useful life; and began to consider whether there was not some way in

which he might employ himself. Such thoughts as these, and the long conversations he had with Harrowby in their walks, were of decided benefit to him, though two or three wet days were sufficient to make him begin his old grumbling and complaint of the horrid stupidity of the country; still he was, as he himself said, "decidedly improved."

A day or two before Agnes' departure, they had asked a few friends to dinner, as a sort of farewell party to her: the Harrowbys were, of course, amongst the guests; Mrs. Foster, Mrs. Bellamy, and the doctor of the village, who was a very old friend of Minnie's. She had now got used to housekeeping, and had learnt some good hints from her mother, so that she was not so alarmed at the thought of a dinner-party, as she used to be; although Edward was very particular,—and so she could not help feeling a little anxious; however, it went off without any contretemps.

"How pretty this cottage is, Mrs. Wood-

ford," said Miss Harrowby, when the ladies assembled in the drawing-room; "and so much more room in it than one would suppose, from the outside."

"Yes, there is plenty of room for our small party; the rooms are small, but there are a great many of them. You have never been in the Snuggery, as we call it, have you?"

"No, never."

"That is Edward's exclusive property. I was allowed in it while I was ill, as being so much warmer than any other; he condescended to let me have my piano there, too; but now a turning lathe is there instead, and no one is allowed admittance, but me occasionally; and he won't have work there, or anything like what he calls 'feminine litter.'"

"I daresay he will allow his room exhibited, though, my dear," said Mrs. Foster, "if Miss Harrowby would like to see it."

"Oh! yes; it is not quite a Bluebeard's chamber. We can go through here," said

Minnie, opening a door ; " that's the best of this house, we can go round and round it ; all the rooms open one in the other."

Miss Harrowby followed Minnie ; a low fire was burning on the hearth. Minnie stirred the logs slightly, and they blazed up ; the flame glittered on something on the floor, which Miss Harrowby's quick eye instantly perceived ; she stooped and picked it up, and, with a strange smile, said, as she handed it to Minnie,

" Some 'feminine litter' is allowed here ; that is Miss Hay's bracelet."

" So it is, I declare. Oh ! I daresay she and Edward have been plotting, or arranging something here ; I think I can guess about it. Do not take it away ; put it on the table."

" It's a charming room for cosy chat and secret councils ; but, I think, you are very confiding, Mrs. Woodford."

" Yes, am I not ; but you see, it makes me very unhappy ; do I not look so ?" and Minnie lifted a pair of bright eyes, sparkling with fun, to Miss Harrowby's face.

"A time may come, Mrs. Woodford,—when people wilfully shut their eyes — but how foolish I am ; you must forgive me ; I took a strange interest in you from the first, which makes me bolder than I ought to be. Shall we return to the drawing-room, now ?"

Minnie, astonished to find her visitor was in earnest, scarcely knew how to answer, and so, only saying—

"Oh yes ; certainly !" led the way back to the drawing-room. But this conversation made Minnie very thoughtful and absent ; for she wondered why Miss Harrowby disliked Agnes so much as to wish to make such deadly mischief as she evidently meant to do. Dear, good Agnes, who had been so useful and kind to her ; whenever she talked to Edward it was for some good purpose, and he was always kinder and more loving to her afterwards. Suppose she had been in his study, what of that ? He had called her there, very likely, because he had something to say to her ; and

then Minnie remembered that her birthday was near, and perhaps it was about that they had been concerting some plan. In short, Miss Harrowby's insinuations only made the loving, trusting wife think how unamiable Miss Harrowby was, and how much superior was dear Agnes, who never said an unkind thing of any one.

"Minnie, it's awfully slow; sing, or do something;" was the first thing which roused her from her reverie, whispered by her husband.

"Yes, darling, I'll sing directly;" she said. And, going to the piano, she sang one of her husband's favourite songs with unusual taste and feeling. He had returned to Agnes, and was talking to her, when she commenced, but at the second verse he rose and came beside her, and, as she finished, he whispered:

"Beautiful! you never sang so well in your life."

Dear Minnie! What did she care for base

insinuations now. The moment she saw the hand she knew so well turning the leaves of the song, she felt she could defy the world. He was by her side, listening to her as of old; who could shake her confidence in his love and truth. That he admired and appreciated Agnes Hay, was only another proof to her of his own good disposition—an assurance that he estimated what was excellent, and more than ever convinced by his words of praise, she rose from the piano with a face bright with love and joy, and going at once to Agnes, said with peculiar tenderness:

“Agnes, dearest, sing me one little song; I shall not hear your dear voice much more.”

“Willingly, dear Minnie, if I shall not horrify your guests.”

“There is no fear; let us have ‘Bonnie Prince Charlie.’ ”

She went with her to the piano, stood by her whilst she sang; and, with a proud smile, beckoned to her husband to come and turn the

leaves over. Oh ! how an evil temper can mar the most perfect beauty. At this moment those who might have seen Miss Harrowby for the first time would have called her plain.

She sang, however, at once when Edward asked her, though it was, after Miss Hay ; and after a little more music, and some good stories told by the old doctor, who was a most amusing companion, the party broke up.

The following Wednesday, Agnes Hay took her departure ; and poor Minnie cried as though her heart would break. Agnes felt greatly inclined to keep her company ; but she was too brave to give way, and only a long, long tender kiss and close pressure of the little hand which grasped her's, spoke of how much she felt the parting.

"She ought to have waited for my birthday, ought she not, Edward, dear?" said Minnie through her tears, as she stood watching the carriage out of sight.

"Yes, Pet; but the old lady would not have spared her any longer. She cannot bear the house without her, and no wonder."

"No wonder, indeed. I am sure we shall miss her. I think she has made us both wiser and better."

"Plenty of room for improvement on one side, at least, isn't there, little woman?"

"Mine, you mean," said Minnie, trying to smile.

"Yes, of course," answered her husband; "but now let us think how we shall amuse ourselves. Suppose we do the domestic, and take a drive together."

"Willingly," answered Minnie; and she ran off at once to prepare, though she was obliged to put on a thick veil to hide her swollen eyes.

On Saturday was Minnie's birthday; and when she came down to breakfast, she found a parcel on her plate, on opening which, she saw with delight it contained a hair bracelet, the facsimile to the one Miss Harrowby had found in the Snuggery.

"She looked up at her husband, who sat, smilingly, watching her open it.

"Edward, dear, this is from you, I'm sure; and the hair is —"

"Guess," he said.

"Agnes Hay's."

"Quite right. Are you pleased? Is it what you would have liked?"

"Indeed it is, dear, exactly."

"You are smiling as at some thought; what is it?"

"Well, I half guessed this present was coming; for I found Agnes's bracelet on the floor in your room."

"Ah! that was the day the bracelets returned from the jewellers who made yours. Miss Hay lent hers for a pattern; for she said she had heard you say it was the prettiest hair bracelet you had ever seen; I thought I heard you coming, just as I opened the box, so I tossed hers to her, popped the box with yours in it into my pocket, and walked out of one door

and she at the other. In the evening afterwards, I found it lying on my table ; so, I suppose, as you found it on the floor she did not catch it, for I never stopped to look."

"I thought it was something of that sort, darling," said Minnie, in answer to this straightforward statement ; and, rising from her place, she kissed him fondly in thanks for his gift, and with a feeling of renewed tenderness that he was worthy of her confidence. A nice letter of congratulation she also received from Agnes, enclosing a splendid piece of work for baby's frock ; for she said, she thought a present for baby would be quite as acceptable as anything to mamma ; and, as she had worked it herself, she flattered herself it would be valuable to dear Minnie. Then came Mrs. Foster, with congratulations and birthday remembrances, and spent the day with them ; and baby came down arrayed in a new frock, in honor of mamma's birthday, and Edward

noticed it, and that pleased the mother beyond measure; and so the day passed over peacefully and quietly, with nothing to mar its perfect happiness, as far at least as Minnie was concerned. Had Edward been asked, he would have said it had been "horridly slow;" but Minnie had been happy, he knew — and he was beginning to think that was an object to be desired.

CHAP. XVI.

Phæbe's Visitor.

THE time wore on—the trees had become leafless; the sky leaden and grey, and the wind had a kind of stormy, whistling, winter sound in it, which made one look gratefully at the cheering fires, and glad to close the shutters and curtains, and light the lamp, and draw round the pleasant blaze and warmth—rendered pleasanter by the cold and dreariness without. Poor Robin, in his wretched prison, dragged on a weary existence; his wife mechanically going about her daily duties with patient regularity, waiting the time and believing it would come, when Robin should return home cleared from the false charge.

Phoebe, whose distress of mind, as I have said, delayed her recovery, was ordered away for change, and had gone to an Aunt, some thirty or forty miles off. To her, life was such a burden, that she cared not how soon she laid it down, and yet, hoping to live to see poor Robin acquitted, she was willing to try the change of air and scene recommended to her. Minnie had been to see her the day before she left; and, at her request, Edward had accompanied her. It was easy to believe in the report of her love for Robin, by the way she spoke of him then, and the look of gratitude she gave to Edward, when he said he was sure such a thorough good fellow as Robin could never have been guilty of such a crime.

"Do you think he will get off, sir?" she had asked, eagerly.

"I think he will," said Edward. "I believe it is a rare case for a really innocent man to be hanged. Robin is, no doubt, innocent of the crime he is charged with, and there is not much

good in Pryor—he's no great loss, you may depend on it; but such a fellow as Robin Dale won't be hanged. I don't know much about the folks here; but, by what I can hear, the poor wretch that's dead was the only enemy he'd got. Young and old, rich and poor, all speak well of him; and I wish I was a barrister, if only for the day of his trial, to speak in his defence."

Phœbe could have knelt at his feet for these words; but she said nothing, her heart was too full. They had not long left her, when a tap at the cottage door announced another visitor; it was Anne Dale. She had known Phœbe as the inhabitants of a small village mostly know one another, though great friends they had never been, but Anne remembered her husband's last conversation with her on that fatal night. Often since had the words come back to her memory, "Pity her, pity us both, Anne," and she had determined to come and see her before she left, feeling as though it would be something done for Robin.

"Phæbe Winter," she said, "I don't know how you'll take my visit; but I've come to see you, because you were an old friend of Robin's. I am going to see him to-morrow; and I thought he'd like to know how you were."

"Thank you; you're very good," murmured Phæbe. Poor Phæbe did not know how good, how generous it was of Anne to come; or in that plain, homely face, that square, ungainly figure, she might have seen a heroine.

"You're going away for change, ain't you?" asked Anne.

"Yes; they tell me it will do me good; but I doubt it. I'm past doing good to now, I reckon."

"Oh! don't say that, Phæbe; you're young, girl, and that's a great help. But ain't you too weak to be here alone?"

"I'm not long alone, thank you. Mother's gone with some things to the mangle. Poor mother; I'm a great expense to her. She's obliged to do something to help. The boys are

both at work, but it is not much they can earn. For mother's sake I hope I shall be well or out of the way soon."

"Make up your mind to get well, Phœbe ; there's a great deal in that. Giving way and thinking you never will be, goes against you, depend on it. Well I must go now. What shall I say to Robin for you to-morrow?"

"Tell him—tell him I pray for him."

Anne rose to go. Phœbe rose also, holding with one hand by the arm chair, she was so very feeble. They looked in each other's faces for a moment, and, whether their common sorrow and their common love by some strange power drew them together, I know not, but Phœbe fell into Anne's arms in a passion of weeping, and she held her there, tenderly soothing her as a mother would a sobbing child ; and, as she did so, a wailing sound, like sad music, seemed to ring in her ears, "Pity her, pity us both."

In a few moments, Phœbe was again alone ;

but she felt happier—she had kissed Robin's wife. And again she prayed the prayer she had so often uttered since Robin's imprisonment, that he might be saved, and through her means.

Edward and Minnie had been asked to pass Christmas at Moorlands; but Minnie said she could not leave her mother on Christmas-day, but would go a day or two after. The morning before they started, she was busy consulting with Watson what dresses, &c., were to be packed up, when Edward opened her door in great haste, and said Harrowby was going to see poor Robin Dale, and, as he should much like to see him too, he was going to drive him over. It was thirteen miles or thereabouts, and very likely he should not be back to dinner—she was not to wait; and, hastily kissing her, he ran off. Of course Minnie took refuge in her mother, whom she invited at once to dine with her, and remain till her husband returned.

He came in just as they were taking their

coffee, full of excitement; he had seen the poor fellow, and he would stake his existence he was innocent!

"I am not given to the melting mood," he said; "but, to hear him talk was really more than I could stand. I do hope the real culprit will be discovered, for no one who knows Robin Dale, can believe him guilty of wilful murder. If he killed him, it was in fair fight; and then, I believe, he would bravely have said so; he declares he went home from the Three Tuns direct, and never saw Daniel Pryor after he was in his house, before supper."

"Poor fellow," said Mrs. Foster, "I have known him for many years, and I cannot believe any harm of him; I hope and trust he will get off."

"Yes, poor wretch, he's in a miserable plight. Well, at any rate, it makes one's own home look more comfortable—eh! Minnie; give me some coffee,—and a kiss."

Minnie willingly complied with both requests,

and then Edward asked her to sing to him, and, throwing himself on the sofa, he fell asleep, while she sang song after song, in a low, gentle, soothing voice; for she knew one of his delights was, to be sung to while he slept, and that very likely he would wake if she stopped. Her mother worked at her knitting, and so the quiet evening passed, while poor Robin lay on his prison bed, thinking of his home.

CHAP. XVII.

Good News.

THE next day, by six o'clock, Edward and Minnie were at Moorlands. Being her first journey with her baby, Minnie was very anxious about it; and, of course, Edward was cross, and said, if she bothered so about it, he would never bring it out again; other people's babies travelled; hers was not the first child that had ever been twenty miles in a railway carriage; and he could not see what there was to be anxious about; so that Minnie was thankful enough when the journey was ended, and poor baby was safe and warm, and asleep in a little cot Mrs. Ferrars had provided for her.

Certainly, Minnie could not but acknowledge everything was charmingly arranged for their

comfort; and, though rather worried by Edward's fit of crossness about the baby, she thought she should enjoy her visit.

Whilst she was dressing for dinner, her room door opened, and a bright voice said, "I could not stop to knock!" and she was soon smothered with kisses, by Agnes Hay. She had been asked to dinner to meet them. They had a long talk; so that Minnie's progress was much delayed, and the bell sounded before she was ready. However, by the help of Agnes and her maid she got down a few minutes after, and found she was not quite the last, as several of the young ladies were not down.

Frank Ferrars received her cordially. He was at home to spend Christmas, and was going to be ordained at the ensuing ordination. This piece of news Agnes had confided to Minnie.

They had a pleasant evening, Minnie and Agnes were so glad to be together again; and Edward, having forgotten all his irritation, was ready

to laugh and joke with Agnes, and his old friend Ferrars.

After the ladies had gone to bed, Ferrars proposed a cigar :

"I shan't indulge in many more, for, though I do not see the least sin in it, still I think it will be more advisable not; but it seems more sociable, and one can chat over a cigar so comfortably."

Edward was nothing loth; and so, adjourning to the room which Mrs. Ferrars allowed to be set apart as a smoking-room, they supplied the fire with fresh fuel, and, drawing some comfortable chairs near it, they prepared for a chat.

"Well! I want to know how you like the country," said Ferrars; "whether you are more reconciled to it?"

"Not one bit. Harrowby, as I wrote you word, is our curate; and he and I are very good friends, and that passes the time a little; but it is horridly slow."

"Because you have no employment."

"That's it, old fellow—you're quite right; and what am I to do? I declare I'll bring up my child to some profession. Oh! I forgot, it's a girl; well, if ever I have a boy, he shall never live such a life as I do. I believe, Ferrars, it's a misfortune for a young man to have money left him; I assure you I envy the day-labourers in the field."

"Then, why do you not do something?"

"Because I can't tell what to do. What is there for a man of my age to do?"

"I should not rest till I'd found something, if I were you. Want of occupation is the most wretched thing a person can suffer under; idleness is, indeed, the root of all evil."

"Yes, I know that; it makes me discontented with myself and every one about me. I did not feel it so much in London; I knew heaps of people. There was the club, the theatres, the parks, the exhibitions—always somewhere to go and something to see; but in the country

a man without occupation is likely at last to become only a fit object for the county lunatic asylum. I declare, though I dare say you'll laugh at the very thought of it, I'd take orders; but I've a strong feeling about it, stronger than you or any one would give me credit for, and people would say I did it for something to do, and of course that would influence me to a certain extent, and that would not be right. Besides I'm not near clever enough; I have not studied the subject. The best boy in the National School would beat me."

"No, I do not think orders would do for you exactly," said Ferrars, smiling. "With the best intentions which I believe you to have, you are scarcely the sort of person for such a grave profession. You should have been a soldier or a sailor."

"Yes; it's too late to think of that."

"Yes, it is; but I would try, if I were you, to make myself useful in some way or other. What do you think of becoming a county magistrate?" said Ferrars, laughing.

"Well, that never occurred to me. I think I should rather like that. I always like trials and all that sort of thing—punishing vice and rewarding virtue. It's not a bad idea. I'll think it over. Isn't it strange we should have the Harrowbys in our village? But Minnie can't get on with the young lady."

"No; she's a strange person; very unlike your wife. You're a fortunate fellow. You drew a prize in the lottery of marriage. Most of us draw blanks."

"I don't know, I'm sure. There's a prize to be had in this part of the world. I never saw a woman to equal Agnes Hay. I love my poor little Minnie dearly, and would not change her for the best woman in the world; but Agnes is the most extraordinary person I ever saw. She's more sense in her little finger than other women have in their whole bodies."

"She is very clever and very good too. I believe, I have known her ever since she was quite a little girl."

"Well, I can't think why you have never married her."

"Because she is too good to care about me, and has known me too long. People never marry those they have known from childhood."

"Well, it seems to me that the more you know of her the more you must love her. You ought to be married, old fellow; you'd make a much better husband than I do. I can't stand the bothers of married life, and the never being able to do as one likes. When I was single, if I stopped out late there was no one at home to be frightened; if I did not come back to dinner there was no one at home to be dull. Oh! it doesn't suit me at all."

"When you were single, and stopped out late," answered Ferrars, "there was no one at home to listen to what you had been doing, to smile at what had amused you, to sympathise with what had worried you; there was no one at home to give you a joyous welcome,

no one who had listened for your footstep, and, when she heard it, thought it sweeter music than any which could meet her ear—”

“By Jove, Ferrars, you’re in love—the man’s in love!” interrupted Woodford, jumping out of his chair, and capering about the room. “You never came the sentimental before in your life. It isn’t like you a bit. Caught at last, as I’m a Dutchman.”

“Don’t be such a fool, Woodford,” said Ferrars, pulling him back into his chair, “you’ll wake all the house. Love and I have parted company this long time. But I own I think that when a man is so fortunate as to meet with a woman whom he loves, and who loves him, there can be no state in life so nearly approaching to perfect happiness.”

“Oh! my dear fellow, say you don’t know. However, as I said, I believe married life would suit you better than me. One thing, you would have an occupation; you wouldn’t be always at home, hearing the baby cry. I know very well

if I was in your position, I should look twice at my comfortable rooms in College, and my independent life, and satisfactory income, before I changed them for the thralldom of married life. But I believe, mind you, it would suit you; you're just the sort of fellow, and would, I am sure, make a capital husband. You like to be loved—to feel that there was one person who loved you better than life, and whose sole earthly happiness was centred in you, would delight you, and enable you to bear the thralldom."

"I don't know that, I'm sure," said Ferrars, smiling his peculiar smile. "At any rate I know of no such person, nor am I likely to now."

"I'm not so sure of that. However, I must go. No more whiffs to-night, old fellow; I shall catch it as it is, for waking Minnie. There you are again, you see; a poor wretch can't even smoke a cigar in peace after he's married."

"You may depend on it the women are all

in white dressing gowns, chattering together in some of their rooms, and not thinking of going to sleep. However, I won't keep you. I think Mrs. Woodford is a model wife to allow you to smoke at all. Some wives will not allow their husbands to touch a cigar."

"How that fellow raves about my wife," was Edward's mental reflection as he went up to bed.

The next day they were all invited to dine with Mrs. Crawford. They were to go early without ceremony; but this of course they did not do, neither would Mrs. Ferrars take all her daughters, only the elder one, as she said the room would be full of only her family. The squire and his daughter were the only guests besides themselves. The dinner was magnificent, and Edward was delighted; he said he had seen nothing so good since he left town. Moreover, Mrs. Crawford wore her favourite turban, which, without any regard to fashion, she had done for so many years. During the evening, Ferrars managed to get a few minutes' conver-

sation, which he had been scheming to do, with Agnes.

"Only fancy," he said, "Mrs. Harrowby has written to my mother to-day, to ask herself and daughter for a day or two on their way to her father's; and my mother has written to say they can come. It is most vexatious. I think I must tell my mother. And how she can persist in coming, I cannot imagine. What is her motive?"

"She thinks you will propose again."

"No, no; I am not such a fool as that. She is indeed mistaken, if that is her idea. Fascinated by her extraordinary beauty, I was blind to her faults; but she has herself opened my eyes, and nothing would now induce me to make her my wife. But it is most annoying her coming to the house. I'd go up to Cambridge again; but I can't well do that without giving my father and mother some reason. I am sure they suspect something. Shall I tell them?"

"Yes, I would, certainly; and perhaps they will make some excuse not to receive them, and then you need not go away again so soon."

"Oh! who cares whether I go or stay. No one will miss me."

"Your mother and sisters will."

"Not they. They are too much accustomed to my absences; it would be quite a strange feeling to me to know that my presence was necessary to any one's happiness."

Ferrars looked at Agnes very searchingly as he said this; but it was difficult for him to see her face, for she was bending her head down to fasten the clasp of her belt, which had come undone. And as the next instant Mrs. Crawford called her to sing, there was no renewal of their conversation that night.

The next morning, immediately after breakfast, Ferrars told his mother he wanted to speak to her for a few moments. She went with him at once into the library.

"I wanted to tell you, mother," he said,

"that I should be glad, if it is not too late, if you could in any way prevent the Harrowbys visiting here whilst I am at home. The fact is, I foolishly," he continued, with the old curl of his lip, "proposed to Isabella; she gave me every reason to believe she would accept me first, as you may suppose; to my astonishment she refused me."

"Refused you, my dear boy!" interrupted his mother. "Impossible! why I thought she was dying of love for you; and knowing, that in a worldly point of view, it was a most desirable connection, I have endeavoured to encourage her coming here."

"You see, my dearest mother, there is no accounting for women. Without being a coxcomb, I might have believed I was not indifferent to her, then."

"Decidedly! I am astonished beyond measure, and disgusted with her to go trifling with you in such a manner. Why I understand she'll have fifteen thousand pounds."

Ferrars smiled.

"Oh! yes, mother; she is quite a 'catch' for somebody, beauty and riches, an uncommon combination; but I am not the fortunate individual, and am not desirous to meet her again. It was far from agreeable last time."

"Well, my dear Frank, I do not really know how to get out of it now; they come to-morrow."

"Then I shall run up to town on 'important business.' How long do they stay?"

"Only three days."

"Very well; then I shall go off by an early train to-morrow. You can explain to my father."

And so it was settled, and Ferrars started by the six o'clock train in the morning, having told Woodford his story over their cigar in the evening. Minnie was satisfied with her discernment, when her husband told her this. She had always, she said, thought there was something between Ferrars and Miss Harrowby; and it cer-

tainly did not increase Minnie's admiration for her. They arrived duly the next day, and she was full of affection for "dear Mrs. Woodford;" but Minnie avoided her as much as possible. The weather had increased greatly in severity, and the ice was thick enough to afford the amusement of skating; so it was arranged on the following morning that Edward and young Harrowby should go off to a lake in the squire's park to skate, and the ladies were to come and inspect them. But the morning post brought Minnie a strange letter, which altered their plans materially; it ran as follows:

"Honoured Madam,

"I am in such trouble, and do not know
"who to write to, to help me. There is a poor
"man here, who is a dying from a hurt he has
"got by a horse kicking; and he is brought in
"our house, and said he had something on his
"mind; and seemed in such a state when he
"knew I came from Grassdale; and I cannot

"help believing he knows something of the
"murder.

"What can be done? Would kind Mr. Wood-
"ford come over, for I don't know what to do;
"he won't say any more; he don't seem able
"to say much,—and I don't think he can last
"long. I so fear he will die before it is found
"out. Forgive me, for I feel so anxious, and
"I am,

"Your humble servant,

"PHOEBE WINTER."

"Well, Minnie, that is very curious, and
ought to be seen into at once," said her hus-
band, when he had read the letter she handed
him. "You see, this has been forwarded from
home, so some time has already been lost. I
wonder if Mr. Ferrars would lend me the dog-
cart; I'd go over at once and see into this
business. Even if there's nothing in it, it would
be something to do. Harrowby would go with
me, I dare say."

"Yes, do go, dear," said Minnie; "what a

good day's work it would be, if Robin could be proved innocent. I am sure it is quite worth a trial. What's the distance? You can get back to-night, can you not?"

"Oh! yes; luckily, it's nearer here than Grassdale; not more than twelve or fourteen miles. I certainly will go. If there's any difficulty about the dog-cart, I'll hire something at the inn. I don't care for breakfast, if Harrowby doesn't; I'll snatch a cup of coffee, and be off," so saying, he hurried through his dressing, and went to Harrowby's room; he was willing enough to go with him; the matter was soon explained to the rest of the household, and Mr. Ferrars assuring Woodford that the dog-cart was quite at his service, he and Harrowby were off in an hour from the receipt of the letter.

The horse was an excellent one, and they soon found themselves approaching the small village of Knapton; but, as Phœbe, in her haste, had omitted to mention the name of her

aunt, with whom she was staying, they had some difficulty in finding the house; but at length discovered it, by inquiring at the small inn, where the man who had met with an accident had been carried to. They learnt that it was at a small farm-house just beyond the village, "maybe, a quarter of a mile." Anxious to save time, they resisted the solicitation of the ostler, "to put the horse up, as it wan't but just a step to walk," and drove rapidly through the village, to the house described.

On asking for Phœbe Winter, of the little girl who answered the knock, she instantly opened the room door, and, saying "Gentlemen for Phœbe," backed out, leaving them to enter. An exclamation of delight, and a figure springing forward to welcome them, showed them they were right.

Change had done wonders for Phœbe; and the flush of excitement at seeing her visitors, made her look once again as lovely as ever.

Harrowby quite started at the unexpected sight of her beauty, for Edward, too much engrossed in the subject of his journey, had never, for a wonder, thought to mention it.

"He is still alive, sir," said Phœbe, "but very low, and we have just sent for the clergyman; he says, if he was sure he was dying, he'd tell him everything."

"Have you seen him, yourself, Phœbe?" asked Edward.

"Oh! yes, sir; I help nurse him; he is a poor wretched object, and seems to have no one to care for him. Sometimes he wanders, and then he talks about a 'canting hypocrite,' and, 'what did he want to preach to me for,' and, 'I'll knock him down again;' and all such things as that—which makes me sure he means Daniel Pryor. Oh! sir," she continued, clasping her hands, and looking up with her lovely eyes, swimming in tears, to Edward's face; "if we can save poor Robin."

"We will, my good girl—we will, if pos-

sible; depend on my helping, to the best of my power; but I have forgotten to tell you, that this is Mr. Harrowby, our curate, at home."

"I thought it was, sir," said Phœbe, turning and curtseying, with pretty rustic grace, to Harrowby. "I have often seen Mr. Harrowby go by our cottage. Oh! here comes the little boy who has been for the clergyman. Well, Bobby, what does he say?"

"He ain't at home," said the child; "and won't be, afore night."

"Dear me; what's to be done?" asked Phœbe.

"Can't I go to him?" said Harrowby.

"Certainly, if you would, sir," said Phœbe, "one clergyman must be the same as another."

"Then lose no time, Phœbe, lead the way; but give me paper and a pencil, in case he confesses, that I may take it down. Quick; there's a good girl."

In a moment Phœbe got what was required,

and led the way to the sick man's room. Her aunt was seated by his bedside. She rose, and left the room when the gentlemen entered, Phœbe having whispered to her who they were.

The man was a fearful-looking object, deeply marked with the small-pox; with sandy hair, through which a brush never seemed to have passed; unshaven chin, and thick, bushy eyebrows, meeting over his eyes. The horrid expression of his face, increased by the pain he was suffering, he certainly formed a strange contrast to the beautiful girl, who, bending gently over him, told him the clergyman had come. He opened his eyes languidly, and gazed round the room, and then, beckoning Harrowby to him, asked him, in a low voice, if he thought he was dying.

"That is impossible for me to say, my good man," he answered; "you are dangerously ill; but, of course, it is in the power of Him who laid you here, to raise you up again."

"I'd tell you something, if I thought I should n't get well," he said.

"If it is to serve any one, you ought to tell it, any how," answered Harrowby. "Now, a man has been found dead in Grassdale, and another man, of hitherto excellent character, has been put in prison, suspected of murdering him; supposing you could throw any light on this, you would be doing one good act—an act of justice."

The man started, and looked eagerly at him. He said:

"How did you know I was ever there—maybe, I never were."

"Perhaps not; I only said 'suppose,' you know; it is a fearful thing for an innocent man to be punished for a crime he never committed."

"And, if I could say who done it, he'd be let off?"

"Certainly, if it could be proved."

"Well! I've never done much good in my

life. I knows I'm a going now, and so I'll be a help to that poor critter, and ease my own mind. I done it." Then, in his strange language, he said, that he had met a man that night, and, in a joke, he had asked him to stand him something to drink; that the man not only refused, but began to preach to him, and he had told him he was a better man than him, and he would fight him. One word led to another, and, as he had already had as much to drink as he could carry, he was easily made angry. He hit the man a violent blow that knocked him over; and, his head coming in contact with a stone, he lay senseless upon the ground. Terrified at what he had done, he ran off; and hearing, in the morning, at the next village, where he slept, that a murdered man had been found close by Grassdale, he left the neighbourhood at once; and he had been since wandering about, getting a livelihood as he best could, always fearing people were on his track. He had neither kith nor kin, that he knew of, but had made his

mind up to get back to his native home, some hundred miles off, when the accident happened to him, which laid him on his deathbed.

All this Edward carefully took down, and, at its conclusion, the poor wretch sprung suddenly up in bed, and then, falling back with a heavy groan, expired.

Edward called the woman of the house at once, and then went down to tell Phoebe the result of the interview; and, as nothing more could be done there, they started back again, after taking some refreshment, which Phoebe begged them to do, before they left.

They left her full of hope that all would be right for Robin, and that, once again, she should see him in freedom, in his native home—taking his old place at Church—wandering in his garden, tending his plants; or working in his shed. She thought she should no longer be wretched at seeing him with his wife—to know that he was free from prison, free from the charge of crime, would subdue every selfish

sorrow; and so, poor Phœbe went to bed happier that night, than she had been since she first heard Robin Dale was going to be married.

As soon as Edward and Harrowby arrived at home, they were eagerly accosted by all, to know the success of their mission; and Mr. Ferrars' advice was, to take a copy of the man's confession, and immediately forward it to the magistrates who committed Robin.

Edward remembered who they were, and, instantly after dinner, he sat down and wrote them a full statement of the case, enclosing the copy of the confession.

CHAP. XVIII.

Bad News.

AS the parties had been disappointed of their skating expedition, Agnes Hay, who had come up to go with them, had remained all day, and, with the rest, was most anxious to know the success of Edward's journey; for she, knowing all the parties, felt a double interest in them; and so she went and sat beside him in the evening, and asked him all particulars about poor Phœbe; and they talked on eagerly together, engrossed in their subject, unmindful, as usual, that the eyes which so often watched them were on them now.

Minnie saw it; saw the serpent-like gaze resting on them, and knew what the evil thoughts were which caused such watchfulness,

and in what bitter words they would soon be expressed. She had taken an opportunity that day to show her bracelet to Miss Harrowby, and explain how Agnes Hay's bracelet came in her husband's room ; but Miss Harrowby's only answer had been, " I have known Miss Hay longer than you have." And now, as they were talking so eagerly together, and she was watching them, Minnie, gentle Minnie, felt more angry than she had ever done in her life. How dare that wicked girl try to shake her confidence in her husband and her friend ? What had she done to her that she should wish to undermine her happiness ? And, at the moment, the thought struck her, which had never occurred to her before, it was jealousy of Agnes Hay ; and now she recalled a thousand little things she had not noticed at the time, which convinced her that Agnes loved Ferrars, and that Miss Harrowby had discovered it. Why she had refused him, of course Minnie could not tell ; but she cared, evidently, sufficiently for him to

hate any one he loved. She had never made the slightest remark about his absence; but Minnie had remarked that, when his mother said he was in town on business, her face had crimsoned painfully, and left her deadly pale."

"Well, Miss Hay," said Edward, when they had sufficiently discussed the affairs of Phœbe and Robin, "what do you think of me? Am I improved? I don't believe I've called the baby a brat once since you left."

"No; but you were very naughty on the journey, calling it 'a nuisance,' etc., etc."

"Yes; because Minnie made such an absurd fuss about it, as though a baby had never travelled before."

"It was the first time her baby ever had; and in winter there was a risk, which, quite naturally, made her anxious. She is so clever about her baby, and knows so much more about the management of it than many young mothers. I am sure the darling does her every credit; for her nurse-maid knows nothing at all about

it. If it was not for dear Minnie making it her study as she does, you would not have that beautifully healthy child, of which any father might be proud."

"Well, I admit it's a jolly little thing ; but I did not know Minnie knew anything about its management. I should have thought she was too much of a baby herself to look after or understand another."

"Then you made a mistake for once, did you not," said Agnes, smiling. "Minnie makes no boast of what she knows ; but she goes on in her quiet, unobtrusive way, always doing her duty—as the sun fulfils its course—unnoticed, because it is done so perseveringly, as we cease to notice the unvarying recurrence of day and night. You men do not know what a really anxious thing is the management of a home ; how much care and thought it needs. You think there are servants paid to do the work, and the mistress has simply to order ; but you forget that not only has she to order with judg-

ment, 'according to her husband's circumstances, but she must see, that what she has said must be done, *is* done. In her nursery there is the same necessity; but all the while the machinery works well, and nothing is out of order, the husband is content, and thinks his home is very comfortable; he has capital servants, and his wife has nothing to do."

"How you do abuse the unfortunate man, Miss Hay. You hate the race, I believe."

"Indeed, I do not; but they make mistakes, I think, which require rectifying."

"And you are always ready to shew them their errors, eh?"

"Not all," said Agnes, laughing; "only those who are worth the trouble."

"I am flattered that you think me so," he said, very earnestly — so earnestly that Agnes was startled; and, thinking they had talked enough, she rose, and saying she was going to chat with Minnie, she walked across to her. Minnie made way for her, with a sweet smile,

on the ottoman on which she was sitting; and Agnes, looking in her face, thought "it was as the face of an angel."

When Minnie went to bed that night a small packet was brought to her room-door by Miss Harrowby's maid; she opened it with astonishment, and read as follows:—

"By a strange accident, the enclosed has come into my hand. Make what use you will of it; but, I beseech you, do not name me in the matter. May it open your eyes to the *friend(!)* you cherish, and spare you much misery. I go by the early train, and I shall not see you in the morning.

"Your *true* friend,

"J. H."

The piece of paper enclosed ran thus:—

"That I love him I cannot but own to myself, while I hate myself for my folly, knowing that his heart is given elsewhere. Each day I make fresh resolutions, and each day I

“break them; because each day I indulge myself in the same delusion that he does not love her; they are so unsuitable, it seems impossible.”

Minnie read this several times, carefully; it was Agnes Hay's writing. She knew it well. She sat down to think, for a few minutes, and then hastily opening her desk, she wrote this answer, reinclosing the slip of paper :—

“My dear Miss Harrowby, — I am exceedingly obliged for the unaccountable interest you take in me and my affairs; but, once for all, and I trust for the *last* time, that this subject is ever named between us, I must beg you to understand that nothing can shake the perfect trust I have in my husband's love and honour. That he admires the young lady whom you seem so anxious to calumniate, I am not surprised. Who could know her and not do so? If I thought she returned that admiration till it became love, I should

"only pity her, because he had known me first;
"the only reason which could prevent her being
"in my happy and envied place. If any private sorrow has caused you to entertain this
"bitter feeling against her, I grieve for you;
"and, in conclusion, offer you my congratulations that you have not in the slightest degree disturbed the peace of mind of

"Yours, very truly,

"M. W."

This she sealed and sent off to Miss Harrowby's room by Watson, and had scarcely done so when her husband entered. He came up to her, and, laying his hand on her shoulder, said:

"Dear little woman, you look flushed and tired; you have nothing to worry you here, no bothering household matters; and baby is quite well, isn't she?"

"Oh, yes, darling, thank you, quite well! I am tired with doing nothing, I think. I lead a shamefully idle life here."

"Well, that will do you good, and make you strong. You'll have plenty to do when you get home again. I have been taking a peep at baby, and she looks so cozy and comfortable, tucked up in her cot, like a bird in a nest."

"You never mean that you have been to see her, really."

"I have, positively."

"Then you *are* a dear boy. She will soon know you, and hold out her arms to come to you, and call you 'Papa.' You will love her then, will you not?"

"Can I help it? She will call you 'Mamma.'"

It is needless to say what pleasure this tender speech gave Minnie; those who love as she loved will understand it, those who do not will never understand it, however graphically it might be described. Minnie slept that night as peacefully as a child. She knew her husband loved her. He was kind, tender, thoughtful, and considerate to her; she had

nothing more to ask or require. She would not insult him with any questions, or tell him for worlds Miss Harrowby's insinuations. What she had written to her, she felt acutely; and her quiet sleep proved her statement, that her peace of mind was not in the least disturbed.

The following morning the post brought an acknowledgment of the receipt of Edward's letter to the magistrates, with a letter from the prisoner's attorney, requesting his and Harrowby's attendance at the trial, which was to take place two days from the date of the letter. The same post brought a letter for Mr. Ferrars, which, when Lucy opened the bag, she said was from Frank.

"But I don't know whether it was written after dinner or not; but it's very strange writing, really shameful," she continued, examining it closely.

"Who is it for? Me, do you say?" said her father. "If so, hand it up."

"Yes, for you, papa."

She gave him the letter, but in a moment all at the breakfast table saw there was something wrong. He folded the letter and putting it in his pocket, said to his wife—

“Frank, my dear, is not very well. I shall run up to town, I think, by and bye.”

“Not well—Frank—give me the letter;” said Mrs. Ferrars, eagerly.

“After breakfast, love, we’ll talk it over; it’s nothing at all serious, I hope. Doctors are sometimes easily alarmed, and have alarmed him, probably.”

“George, I really must read the letter;” said Mrs. Ferrars, still more earnestly.

And Lucy, who was the only one of the sisters down, begged too to be told the worst.

“Well, if you must have it, you must; but I thought it would have been better to wait till you had taken some breakfast. The fact is, he writes word that he has been thrown from a horse he had been trying for a friend, and is a good deal hurt. He should have said nothing

about it, but the doctor threatened to write himself, if he did not; and he thought that would alarm his mother more. He says he hopes to be well in a day or two. But I think it would be more satisfactory, mamma, if you and I ran up to see him."

Poor Mrs. Ferrars could not answer; she was in tears. And Lucy ran off to communicate the bad news to her sisters. Edward was much concerned about his friend; and said, if they thought he could be of any use he would go too. But Mr. Ferrars, thanking him, said, he considered that great quiet was, probably, important; and that the less people he saw, the better. But that if Mrs. Woodford and he would excuse them, they would themselves start off by the next train.

"I will leave you, Mrs. Woodford, in charge of the girls; and should anything more serious than we apprehend occur, I will send for them. I hope you will make yourselves quite at home in our absence, and not think of shortening

your visit, as I shall consider it really kind of you to stay with the girls."

"I must leave," said Edward, "to attend the trial about this murder business to-morrow; but if you really wish Minnie to stay I am sure she will, and I can come back for her on Friday. By that time I hope you will have returned, bringing Frank back with you quite recovered, or at least mending."

Mr. Ferrars shook his head; he was evidently more anxious than he liked to say. But little breakfast was eaten by any of the party. The girls were very fond of their brother, and were much distressed; and poor Mrs. Ferrars was in tears all the time, refusing anything but a cup of coffee, which her husband said she must take, or she should not go with him. The carriage was ordered round immediately after breakfast, and they went off. About an hour after, Agnes Hay arrived, as she generally ran up each morning to see how they were. Minnie

was alone in the morning room when she came in.

"Well, dear, how are you?" she said, coming up and kissing her.

"Quite well, dear, thank you; but we've all been rather upset this morning."

"Indeed! what's the matter? Nothing the matter with baby."

"Oh! no. She's all right—little pet. But did you not know Mr. and Mrs. Ferrars are gone to London?"

"No! Are they? I came in without knocking, and have seen no one. What are they gone for?"

"Their son has met with an accident"—Minnie did not look up from her work as she spoke, but went on—"and I fear he is very badly hurt; at any rate, Mr. Ferrars seemed to think it necessary to go up with his mother to him at once."

Agnes had turned away, and was looking out of window. Finding she made no answer,

Minnie looked up then, and said, "Agnes!" Still she did not turn her head or answer. So Minnie, laying down her work, came to her; and, putting her hand on her shoulder, said again, "Agnes, did you hear?" Then the face was turned to Minnie; and its look of speechless agony told at once the long-concealed story.

"Agnes, dearest; I am so sorry for you," was all that tender-hearted Minnie could say; but the gentle words opened the floodgates—and, laying her head down on Minnie's shoulder, Agnes sobbed forth her sorrow.

"Minnie, Minnie, he will die; what shall I do? I shall never see him again, who has been my life for so many years. What shall I do?"

"Hush! dearest, hush! He is young and strong; everything is in his favour—he will not die—we must not think of giving up yet. Come away to my room; some one will find us here;" and, leading her gently away, that her sorrow might not be intruded on or questioned,

Minnie placed her on the sofa in her own room, and tried, in her tender, loving way, to soothe and comfort her.

As soon as she was somewhat composed, she said :

“ I fear you will think very badly of me, giving my love unasked ; but, who could know him, and not love him. Since I was a child not higher than the table, I have loved him, and thought none equal to him ; when, with my little hands pressed on his face, I used to call him ‘ my pretty boy ;’ and he would take me in his arms and carry me about, and tell me I should not love him, and think him pretty, when I was a big girl. Oh ! that I had died then,” she murmured, and again the tears flowed bitterly ; but, after a moment or two, recovering herself, she said, with a sad smile,

“ You will never call me wise again, Minnie dear ; but, till this moment, I have never mentioned my folly to a human being. He has never guessed it ; he told me of his love for

Isabella Harrowby, knowing not how he wrung my heart the while—told me of his proposal, and her refusal. I heard it all, and loved him still—though ashamed of my own folly ; but I felt they were not suited to one another ; that when his eyes, blinded by her beauty, were opened, he would know she was not ; he has found that out,—but he will die, Minnie, without knowing there is one on earth who would have died for him.”

“ Dear Agnes, take heart ; they have promised to write to-night to the girls, and I will immediately let you know how he is ; of course no one here is aware of your secret.”

“ Oh ! no ; and it is safe with you, I’m sure. Nothing but the sudden news would have made me so foolish as to mention it, although I cannot see there is any shame in loving what is lovely. I do not intrude it on him ; he thinks I care no more for him than the commonest acquaintance.”

“ No, you have kept your counsel well. I

should never have guessed it, but for Miss Harrowby's manner to you, which implied jealousy."

"Yes; I know she dislikes me; but it is because I dislike her, for one thing. I cannot pretend to like any one I do not; and sometimes, I fear, I am almost rude to her. What can I do with my eyes, Minnie; every one will see that I have been crying."

"Stay here, quietly, a little longer; and then a headache, that woman's excuse for a heart-ache, will explain the heavy eyes."

"It will be a real excuse, for it does ache cruelly. I wish I could escape without the girls seeing me; for I am afraid, when they begin to tell me, I shall break down again."

"Well, go out through the garden, and I will say that your head ached so much, you could not stay."

"Thank you, I will;" and so, after a few minutes, Minnie going there first, to see if Agnes could pass through the garden without

observation, she went away, with a heart sadder than it had ever been since she was left an orphan, on the world's mercy.

Minnie had forgotten to ask Agnes, if she might mention their conversation to her husband; and, as she contented herself by telling her husband her own secrets, but never those of other persons, she determined not to say anything to him about it, until she had Agnes' permission, so merely told him what she said to the girls; that Agnes had been in for a few moments, but had gone away again, with a bad headache.

"I tell you what, dear, I think we ought to do," said Minnie; "and I wish we had thought of it before — let poor Anne Dale know what good hope there is for her husband."

"Very true, Minnie; write her a few lines, there's a good girl; but, stay, Harrowby's gone home, you know—he will be sure to tell her, and your mother's thought of it, too, I'll be bound."

"Is Harrowby gone home? I thought he was gone to his grandfather's, with his mother and sister."

"Oh! no; he's gone home. He could not be spared any longer out of the parish; there are a good many sick, he says."

"Well; shall I write, or no?"

"No; I'll write to Harrowby, and get him to call on her: it will be something for me to do; for it's slow work now, and I feel regularly upset about poor Ferrars."

"It is a very sad thing," answered Minnie.

"Do you think he will not recover?"

"Well, I don't know any more than you do; you heard what Mr. Ferrars said; but I thought he seemed very anxious."

"Yes; I shall be glad to get the letter to-morrow: the house seems so wretched."

"It is. Would you like a drive? Because I am sure we may have the dog cart."

"No, thank you, love. I should not like to leave the girls; you go yourself."

"Well, I think I will; and, I say, ought not we to call on Mrs. Crawford, after dining there?"

"Yes, we ought; but I don't think I shall go out to-day, unless the girls wish me."

"Shall I call and take your card and excuses? Because, you see, I shall be gone to-morrow, and when I come back it will only be to take you home."

"Yes, dear, if you like; and tell her I will come myself, if I can, before I leave."

"Of course you told Agnes about Ferrars?"

"Oh! yes."

"Did she seem sorry? For I fancy, you know, she likes him."

"Yes, she was sorry, of course. She has known him a long while."

"I can't think why he didn't fall in love with her, instead of that cold beauty; but I pumped him the other night, and he only said they'd known one another too long to fall in love."

Minnie made no answer, but she feared that was a bad prospect for her friend.

Edward went out, and Minnie went down to join the girls, who were, as usual, very busy. They had not omitted any of their usual employment; though their eyes were red and swollen with crying, they kept on working, drawing, and writing. Minnie thought it was very wise of them, but was sure she could not have done so. As it was, she felt it difficult to settle to anything.

Edward did not return till dinner. He said he had had a most lovely drive, and, barring the want of company, enjoyed it very much. He had called on Mrs. Crawford, and seen Agnes, but only for a moment; her head was so bad, she was going to lie down. When they were alone, he said to Minnie—

“I’m sure that girl’s in love with Ferrars; for she looks more ill than a mere headache would make her look. And when I spoke of his illness, she looked all colours at once.”

"According to your account, she had better not be. Ferrars does not appear to be inclined to marry her," said Minnie.

"I don't know how that would be if he knew she cared for him," answered Edward.
"Well, I shall go and have a pipe; you can call me when the tea is ready."

CHAP. XIX.

Robin's Return.

THE morning's post brought a letter from Mr. Ferrars to the girls, saying that Frank was very seriously hurt, and was very feverish ; which latter symptom the doctors thought badly of. He had two first-rate medical men in attendance, and all was being done that could be done. He would write again to-morrow, and if he was not better the girls should come up to town. This information, though far from satisfactory, Minnie determined to carry to poor Agnes as soon as she had seen Edward off.

She as much dreaded parting with him as ever, even for two days ; but, as she told him, there was now the darling baby to comfort her, and she should give her an extra allowance of

kisses till he came back. Which said kissing she began at once, for she fetched the little thing to see papa off, and would not have let the nurse to have her again all day, had she not remembered her promise to let Agnes know about Ferrars. So she resigned her to Jane's keeping; but said she must have her again directly she came in, for she was to comfort her for papa's loss. Baby crowed her entire approval of the arrangements, and went off sucking a handsome gold pencil-case of her mother's, which, with that weakness nearly always shewn to first children, mamma had given her; because it was a "comfort for her poor little gums." Small indentations in the pencil-case would, ere long, convince Minnie of her error, and suggest for the next, or any amount of future babies, the cheaper "comfort" of an Indian-rubber ring.

Telling the girls she was going to take a walk, and should, probably, call and inquire how Agnes Hay was, she started off, and soon

reached Mrs. Crawford's. Of course she asked for the old lady, and was shewn into the drawing-room. Apologised for her early call, but said that she was taking a walk, and thought they would like to know how Mr. Ferrars was; and that, also, she was not sure of obtaining another opportunity to call. Mrs. Crawford, of course, assured her most politely that she was happy to see her at any time; and, ringing the bell, desired the servant to tell Miss Hay, Mrs. Woodford was there.

"And pray how is young Mr. Ferrars?" she asked.

Minnie told her the substance of Mr. Ferrars' letter.

"Dear, dear; it's a sad thing; I trust he will recover. Mr. Ferrars has a good property to leave, it would be sad to lose his only son. My poor little girl is very much upset about it; they were playmates when quite children, and are quite old friends; so make as light of it as possible."

Minnie had no time to answer before the door opened, and Agnes entered. She looked so ghastly pale she quite startled Minnie, who rose and kissed her; and, knowing Mrs. Crawford was deaf, whispered,

“He is much the same, not worse.”

Agnes pressed her hand in thanks, and went quietly to her seat.

“Mrs. Woodford has called, my dear, to tell us about young Mr. Ferrars; he is much the same, I think you said, Mrs. Woodford; not worse, you see, my dear.”

“No; much the same,” answered Minnie.

“Very kind and thoughtful of Mrs. Woodford, I’m sure, to call and let us know.”

Agnes murmured some reply; she was thinking how she should get a few moments alone with Minnie, but no opportunity offered itself until Minnie was obliged to take her leave, and then fortunately Mrs. Crawford suggested that Agnes should show Mrs. Woodford a beautiful new plant in the greenhouse; and there they

managed to ask and answer the questions each wanted to know. Minnie was so desirous to hear if she might tell Agnes' secret to her husband. And Agnes, after a second's consideration, said—

“Yes, certainly; I should wish you to do so.”

Minnie was very glad of this answer, for she had a little scheme in her head which she would not like to have carried out without her husband's concurrence.

Arrived again at home, she kept her promise to baby, and amused herself with her child during the rest of the day. The Miss Ferrars were all fond of children, and were quite willing that the little one should be down stairs now the gentlemen were out of the way, and were all most kind in helping to amuse and nurse it. Several times Minnie's thoughts reverted to poor Robin, who was then taking his trial, and whom she hoped would before night be restored to his home and his wife, cleared of the awful charge which had been

brought against him. If the earnest prayers of one loving heart were heard, he would be; for during the hours of that day, Phœbe Winter's only thoughts were of Robin Dale, her only prayer, for his safety. Anne had, of course, gone up to the town early in the morning, to wait the result of the trial. Harrowby had called on her before he received Edward's letter, telling her of the favourable turn in affairs, and so she started off early in the morning, to walk to the town, perfectly satisfied that she should return in the evening with her husband.

The court was of course, crowded; for Robin had many friends, and none believed in his guilt, though all could not but own circumstances had been against him.

It is unnecessary to give the trial here—readers of newspapers can imagine it for themselves; suffice it, the high testimony borne to Robin's former character, with the confession of the dying man, to which, of course, Edward

and Harrowby bore witness, was conclusive; and Robin Dale was acquitted, amidst the loud plaudits of the dense crowd assembled; the judge declaring he left the court without a stain on his character. Friend after friend wrung his hand as he came out; and when he reached the street, which he was some time in doing, he found so many vehicles at his service to carry him home, that he knew not which to take. Every one wanted to have the pleasure of driving him back in triumph. It was wonderful to see the calm self-possession with which his wife met him; but it was her nature. She was truly gratified to have him back again—to know he was released from his dreary prison, and spared a shameful death; but she had not words to express what she felt, so she only said,

“I am very thankful to have you out safe, Robin; it's paled your face, being in that dreary place.”

“And shortened my life, too, I reckon, Anne. I seem older by some years.”

"That will all wear off, Robin, my man," said his friend who was driving them. "When we get you once more amongst us, we'll take good care of you, and make you feel young and hearty again."

Robin only shook his head. His friend talked brightly and cheerfully the whole way ; but Robin's heart was too full for words. He only sat silently holding his wife's hand. But when they entered his own village—past the little cottage where he was born—the little shop where he had spent his half-pence in tops and string in his innocent childhood—the school where he had gone as a happy boy—the church which, as boy and man, he had never missed attending, till these last sad weeks—he covered his face with his hands, and sobbed like a child.

His companions said nothing. They could not wonder at his tears, or try to stay them ; their own eyes were filling fast. But the noise of the cart wheels had now attracted attention

in the quiet streets, and every one was soon at the door; children running after them, hallooing and shouting; women waving handkerchiefs and aprons, and bidding him welcome home; old men, who had not been out of their own doors for years, crawling out to bid him "God speed;" all making the warm tears flow faster down poor Robin's cheeks. His house, though Anne had been out all day, was all in order, and a large fire burning on the hearth, the cloth laid, and the supper set out. Who had done this? No one appeared to tell, till he had been seated in his own chair some time; and then the door opened and Mrs. Winter entered.

She came and shook him warmly by the hand, and bid him welcome; and then, turning to Anne, said,

"I thought you would excuse the liberty I have taken, Mrs. Dale; but I thought it would look drear if things wer'nt ready and there was a poor fire for Robin; and so I came and got

all ready, for we're all anxious to show how pleased we are to have him back among us."

And, before they had either of them time to thank her, the good woman was gone. She hurried home, and sat herself down at once (for it was a performance that took her a long time) to write to Phœbe, and tell her Robin Dale was home again safe and well. How the ill-written, ill-spelt letter was treasured by her to whom it was addressed can be easily imagined.

CHAP. XX.

An Invitation.

THE following day, Edward returned to Moorlands, and found his little wife anxiously looking out for him. The news of Ferrars was still very indifferent, and Mrs. Ferrars had written to say, as there seemed little probability of their moving him for many weeks, they had taken a house in town; and the girls were to join them on Monday.

"I do not, therefore, think we shall be needed after to-day, dear," said Minnie; "so I thought we would start home to-morrow; and any day next week, I would go to town with you, that you wish."

"All right—that will suit me, capitally; but

I must write to the old lady, and ask her, what day she can have us."

"Oh! yes; certainly. And now, come and tell me everything you have been doing, and all about the trial. I am so glad poor Robin is free; and then, in return, I will tell you something."

Of course Edward was all impatience to hear what it was she had to communicate; but Minnie would not tell him, till he had told her all the news he had for her, and then she said:

"Well, now, you were quite right about Agnes; she does love Frank Ferrars."

"She does!" exclaimed Edward. "Lucky dog! I always thought so; how he has never seen it, I can't think. Well, I always said that fellow had somebody else's luck, beside his own."

"Yes, she's worth winning, and worth having, isn't she? And we must teach him to see that; and, what I want to know from you

is, whether you will tell him she cares for him; that is, if he gets well, poor fellow; do, darling Edward," continued Minnie, looking coaxingly in his face; "think how happy you might make dear Agnes."

"No!" he said, decidedly. "I'll have nothing to do with it. I hate match-making; the parties never thank you, and it always turns out a mess; if he's such a muff he can't see that the girl's in love with him, I can't help it."

Rather astonished at her husband's unnecessary vehemence, she said, quietly :

"Well, dear, just as you like. Only, as you are fond of both of them, I thought you would like to make them happy."

"Fond of them; who said I was fond of Agnes?" he asked, almost fiercely; "I suppose you're jealous."

"I should not so insult you, or pay myself so bad a compliment," answered Minnie, with gentle dignity; and, rising from her seat, she

walked quietly out of the room, and sought her own—that refuge, where so many bitter tears are shed, so many sorrows thought over, so many angry feelings battled with, unseen but by One, who, from the height of His Majesty, looks down, to pity even the smallest griefs of the meanest of His creatures.

Minnie was hurt and vexed. She had never, for one moment, doubted him, and had carefully concealed from him Miss Harrowby's attempt to shake her confidence in him; and now, for him to accuse her of jealousy was trying, to even her sweet temper; but she soon began to think that perhaps he was tired with his journey, and with all the business he had had to get through; and so, she would let the subject drop, and say no more to him. So, wisely thinking employment was the best cure for unpleasant thoughts, she rang for Watson, and desired her to pack up, as they intended starting for home in the morning; and she went to tell nurse the same. There she found baby warming a pair of rosy

feet before the fire, in Jane's lap, "cooing" away, at the comfort it gave her, and all Minnie's vexation vanished. She took her child in her arms; and its tiny hands, straying over her face, soothed away the irritation, so that when, some minutes after, her husband called her, she went down, looking as bright and cheerful as ever.

"Miss Hay is here," he said; "I don't know if you wish to see her."

"Agnes, oh! certainly; she is come to hear about poor Robin, I suppose."

"I don't know;—I have scarcely seen her."

"Let us come together, then," and, putting her arm through his, she walked into the drawing-room, where Agnes was.

She had come to hear the result of the trial; for Minnie had taken care to send her word of Ferrars, in the morning. She looked sadly pale, and out of spirits; and Edward, after telling her briefly of the trial, walked to the

window, and said nothing more to her; but, when she rose to go, Minnie said,

“Walk with her, Edward, home; I am sure she does not look as though she could take care of herself.”

Edward turned and looked at his wife; and when he met her clear, honest, loving gaze, he walked up to her, and, kissing her, softly murmured :

“Bless you, darling, I will.”

As they walked along, Agnes said very little; no longer had she heart to keep up her gay, joyous, bantering conversation with him, and Edward himself, for some reason, was very silent.

Just as they arrived at her own gate, Agnes said, in a low voice,

“Do you think he,—Mr. Ferrars,—is in danger?”

“I don’t know,” Edward answered, shortly; “but I should think so, by the accounts.”

Poor Agnes made him no answer, but, hur-

riedly wishing him good-bye, entered her own gate; and Edward walked away, and, instead of returning at once, went round by another road, which led, by a longer route, home. He felt worried and depressed, and he knew not hardly why; but his thoughts, if clothed in words, might have been,

“What a fool I am! What is it to me, who she loves, or who she marries? I am perfectly satisfied with my darling little wife; but, once married, all her care and interest for me will end; and I know she has done me good, made me already think of life, and its end and aim, in quite a different way to what I ever looked at it before. If I had only had such a sister, what a much better man I might have been. Well! Ferrars is very fortunate; but, if he marries her, he will never allow her to keep up her friendly confidence with me. I am sure he'd be jealous; why, of course, any man would object to his wife having a very intimate friend of the opposite sex; I know I should.”

And, as this thought passed across his mind, it suddenly occurred to him that it was an equal test of his wife's confidence, his excessive friendliness for Agnes. And the sweet face of love and trust, which had been raised to his as he went out that day rose up before him, like a better Angel, chasing, by its Holy presence, every evil thought—everything, but the happy knowledge, that he possessed the entire love and trust of his true wife.

He hurried home at once, and, calling instantly for Minnie, kissed her fondly, and still better, took the child from her arms, which she was holding while nurse packed up, and positively nursed it for ten minutes.

They proposed starting for home immediately after luncheon the next day; and so, in the morning, Minnie said she should just run up the village, and wish Agnes "good-bye." Edward said she must take his farewell speeches with her, as he had several things he wanted to do, before he left. The morning bulletin of Ferrars had been much

the same; so that what with having to part with Minnie, it was a sorrowful day for Agnes.

The Woodfords reached home without adventure, and Edward's first visit was to Robin, to congratulate him on his return and acquittal. Of course Mrs. Foster dined with them, and gave them all the little news of the village. She said she heard the Harrowbys were to return on Monday; and village gossip had settled that young Harrowby was engaged to Miss Marsham, the squire's daughter. All this was listened to with the interest which is naturally felt by those who are drawn so much together as people in a small country village; for everything in the country, even the most trifling circumstances, are events worth recording and remembering.

The following Tuesday, the Woodfords were once more on their travels. Minnie was very unwilling to leave home again; but she had promised her husband to go, and she would not disappoint him for the world. Mrs. Woodford

was most overpowering in her affectionate reception; but Minnie found a bedroom without a fire for herself, and one appointed for the nurse and child with no fire-place at all. Of course, she was obliged to ask if any other room could be found for baby. But the servant said there was no other unoccupied; and so Minnie requested that a fire might be lighted in her room, and told Jane the baby might be put to bed there. She dreaded Edward coming up to find this intrusion in his room; but what was to be done—in the depth of winter, she could not really put her child in a room without a fire. However, to her great surprise and pleasure, Edward made no complaint at all. He was very anxious that Minnie should be comfortable in his mother's house on this her first visit; and therefore he was determined not to do or say anything to disquiet her, if he could help it.

Mrs. Woodford had mentioned that they had a few friends to dinner, which Minnie was very

sorry to hear, as she was very tired; and as poor baby was very tired and cold too, and the fire smoked instead of burning, and baby cried the whole time she was dressing, Minnie felt very much inclined to cry too, to keep her company. And so she went down to dinner, feeling far more fit to go to bed; for, of course, Jane was very much put out that no better arrangement was made for the child, and, instead of endeavouring to make the best of it, kept reiterating complaints and wishing herself at home. Minnie could not help contrasting their reception at Moorlands, and was quite willing to acknowledge the superiority of Mrs. Ferrars's house-keeping. Nothing could be heavier or duller than the party, nothing more ill-cooked than the dinner; but Minnie, seeing her husband looked very vexed, feigned to be amused, for she did not wish him to think she was uncomfortable in his mother's house. The only part of the visit she really liked, was the necessity to have baby in her room; she had always

wished it; but Edward had set his face so decidedly against it that she had yielded though much against her will. She now only feared that the child would be restless and disturb him; but, luckily, it slept the whole night through, and so the first experiment went off very well.

In the morning, Edward called on Mr. Ferrars, and heard that Frank was better, and, he thought, would be able to see him in a day or two; which was a great satisfaction to Edward, for he really felt a true friendship for Frank, and had been very uneasy at his illness. Edward was delighted to be in London once more; and visited his old haunts, and went to see all his friends whom he could find in town, getting home in time to dress for dinner, and start for the theatre immediately after. Minnie, who thought Mrs. Woodford's house the dullest and dreariest she had ever been in, was glad enough to go out anywhere, and hailed with delight the thoughts of the theatre. As they

drove along, Edward, greatly to Minnie's amusement, exclaimed :

" Oh ! what a treat it is to see those dear gas lamps ! "

" My dear Edward, does London make you so very happy ? " said Minnie, with a feeling of regret that she had taken him from what he loved so much.

Edward seemed to read her thoughts, for he answered readily,

" Yes, I like it immensely. But, you know, I am going to be a county magistrate, and make myself very useful in the country ; so I could not leave now. "

Minnie smiled her thanks ; and nothing more was said, as they had reached the doors of the theatre.

A fortnight passed away very slowly for Minnie ; and then, to her great delight, they returned to their own pretty, cheerful home, which, after the dust and smoke of London, was, to Minnie, particularly refreshing. They

had not been home many days, when they received a letter from Agnes, saying that the Ferrars's had all returned home, and that Frank, though very, very weak, was better.

"I tell you what, Minnie," said Edward; "suppose we ask poor Ferrars to come here for change of air. He raves about you, you know; and would like to have you to nurse him."

Minnie smiled as she said she should be very glad to see him; for she remembered the bouquet, and Edward's remarks about it.

"Pray ask him," she said; "if I did not like him myself, still I should be glad to welcome him as your friend."

"And then," said Edward, "you can tell him about Agnes, if you like."

"Would you like me to do so, Edward?"

"Oh! yes; *you* may, I would not; for men are clumsy managers of such delicate matters."

"Very well; remember you gave me leave. Then write, and ask him."

So that evening Edward indited the following letter to his friend :

“DEAR FERRARS,

“I am glad to hear you are home and
“better; but I believe change of air and scene,
“and the sight of old friends, would do you
“more good than anything. Do come; my
“wife will nurse you.

“Yours very affectionately,

“E. WOODFORD.

“P.S.—Don't mind the 'young lady.' We
“see nothing of her, except an occasional formal
“call. You know, my wife can't bear her.”

This epistle was answered in a day or two by Frank himself, who said it was the first letter he had written, and, therefore, it must not be a long one; that he felt a visit to them would really do him good, and he certainly would come the moment the doctors gave him leave.

CHAP. XXI.

The Old Love and the New.

AND so another week's time found Ferrars installed at Grassdale, and positively in the Snuggery, which Minnie assured him was a great honour.

He looked sadly pale and thin ; and, Minnie felt, required all her care. He had brought a handsome toy for baby ; which she thought was so very nice of him ; and she endeavoured to impress on baby that this first toy was given her by her godpapa. Edward seemed to have quite given up any idea of being jealous of Ferrars, and never looked more pleased than when Minnie was coaxing him to eat any delicacy she had prepared for him, or showing him any kind of attention.

One day, he had been for a walk round the

garden, leaning on Edward's arm, and, feeling tired, had come in to rest on the sofa. Edward had given him a book, and left him, as he said he was going to look up Harrowby, who would feel quite deserted. He had not been long alone, when Minnie entered, with some egg sherry she had prepared for him, which she made him drink ; and then, drawing her chair near him, she said :

"You are feeling much stronger now, are you not?"

"Yes, much. I should be ungrateful if I were not, after all your care."

"You did not seem at all tired after chatting with my mother; yesterday."

"Not at all ; but your mother is so quiet and gentle."

"Yes, she is a darling ; isn't she?"

"You think every one a darling, though, do you not?" said Ferrars, smiling.

"Oh! dear, no ; not every one. I have a few prime favourites."

"School adorations, I suppose."

"Not at all; I never was at school, and my mother never encouraged violent young lady friendships; she said they were so silly, and always ended in equally violent quarrels."

"Very true, and very wise."

"But since I have arrived at matronly dignity," continued Minnie, smiling; "I have formed a lasting friendship, which I think nothing can shake, I mean with your co-sponsor, Agnes Hay."

A slight tinge of colour brightened Ferrars' face, as he answered:

"Well, she is without doubt a charming person. I have known her from a child."

"You would not mind her coming to stay here while you are here."

"Certainly not in the least. Is she coming?"

"I have not asked her yet; but I mean, if you did not think another person in the house would be too much for you."

"Not in the least, particularly such an old friend, who would not think me either very rude or very affected if I kept my place on the sofa."

"I'm sure she would not. Poor girl, I have had a letter from her this morning, written in wretched spirits; and I think change will do her good."

"Wretched spirits! What is the matter?"

"Well, a great deal, I fear. I think by what I have discovered, that she loves some one whom she fears does not return it."

"Miss Hay! loves some one!" exclaimed Ferrars, raising himself on his elbow and looking searchingly at Minnie. "Is it possible?"

"I admit it does seem impossible," continued sly little Minnie, "that any one should know Agnes and not love her, or be so blind as not to see that she cared for them; but she is so sensitive and delicate-minded that she would, of course, be most careful not to show it in the least to the person himself."

"Have you the least idea who the person might be?" asked Ferrars, endeavouring to assume an indifferent manner.

Minnie was rather unprepared for this direct question; and so she said:

"You know all her acquaintances much better than I do, though I might be able to guess. However, you look flushed and tired now; I shall not talk to you one bit more. Try and have a nap." And before Ferrars could stop her, she had left the room.

She did not see much more of him till the evening. He was not equal to sitting up through dinner, so his dinner was always sent him, and they joined him in the evening. And then Minnie noticed that he looked worried and uncomfortable; and she half feared that she had over-excited him by what she had said. However, when she was gone up to bed he handed a note to Edward.

"Read that," he said. "What do you think of it?" It was but a few lines, written with a pencil.

"I can bear it no longer; and at the
"risk of any conclusion you may draw, I must
"tell you, that your illness has made me so
"wretched that I know how mistaken I was;
"I knew not my own feelings. Pity and
"forgive me.

"ISABELLA."

"What the —— well I won't use a naughty word. But what could have induced the fool of a girl to write that," said Edward, starting out of his chair. "I know what it is. I met her to day, and told her Agnes Hay was coming here. She knows the girl is breaking her heart for love of you, and she won't let you have her if she can help it. There, I've done it now; clumsily, as I knew I should; but I'm hanged if I could help it, I'm so provoked."

Ferrars was as white as death, even his lips. But he was not one to betray emotion by words. He only said, quite quietly :

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"Your wife somewhat prepared me for this; or I should have been startled, I own."

"Why, you're white enough as it is. Have some brandy—wine—something? Shall I call Minnie?"

"No, nothing, thank you. I shall be all right again in a minute; let us talk this over—what is to be done?"

"Well, my dear fellow, it depends on yourself; you're a lucky dog," continued Edward, trying to make a joke of the matter; "a lucky dog, indeed, to have two such women after you."

"I would have dispensed with the compliment from one of the ladies; but it is very annoying. However, perhaps I had better sleep on it, and send an answer in the morning. A little boy brought this, your man told me; not one of the servants from the house."

"Well, and about Agnes?" asked Edward.

"What about her?" said Ferrars, smiling.

"What do you mean to do, I mean?"

"Make her Mrs. Ferrars, as soon as she will let me."

"You can't do a better thing, old fellow. She'll be the most perfect wife that ever man had; and, I'll tell you what, let's strike a bargain at once—you always rave about my wife; let me rave about yours."

"Most decidedly, when I have one; but, now, I must get off to bed, for I feel rather done."

"Oh! certainly; let me help you."

Edward took his friend carefully to bed, and calling out, as he closed the door: "Good night! dream of Agnes;" went up to his own room, eager to tell Minnie the news.

Since the despatch of her note, Isabella Harrowby had been waiting with painful expectation for its answer. To analyse her feelings would be difficult. She was not able, herself, to understand them. She fancied that Ferrars was infatuated with her; and, proud to exercise her power over him, and anxious to witness the

effect which a refusal would produce on him, she had tried the experiment; and was bitterly disappointed at the indifference he showed at their next meeting. With the perversity of human nature, she now sighed for the love she had cast away; so when the news of his illness reached her, she was distracted at the thoughts of losing him, and determined, at all hazards, if he lived, that she would strive to win him back to her allegiance.

She had written this note, as her first effort towards obtaining this end; and now, every moment seemed an age, until she should receive his answer. It came the following morning, at breakfast time. She had great self-possession, and, when her mother asked her, who her note came from, she calmly answered, "It came from the Woodfords;" and, putting it in her pocket, finished her breakfast, without looking at it.

But, the moment the meal was ended, she flew to her own room, and, locking her door,

sat down to read the precious lines she longed, yet dreaded, to see. They ran thus :

“ Dear Miss Harrowby,

“ It is needless to say with what surprise
“ I read your note, or how much it has dis-
“ turbed me. When, fascinated by your beauty,
“ I offered you my heart, your cold and decided
“ refusal showed me your indifference and my
“ mistake. My eyes were at once opened to
“ the fact, that we should never be happy to-
“ gether ; and that opinion remains still un-
“ changed. That you may find some one more
“ worthy of you, and with whom you may pass
“ many happy years, is the sincere wish of,

“ Dear Miss Harrowby,

“ Yours, faithfully,

“ F. FERRARS.”

She read it through twice, and then, rising with a face and lips of ashy paleness, she tore the note in a thousand pieces, and murmuring,

between her teeth, "he has scorned a woman's love; he has now to feel her vengeance!" She threw the pieces into the fire, watched them burn quite out, and then went down stairs, as calm as though nothing had occurred to disturb her serenity.

As soon as possible, on the receipt of Minnie's letter, Agnes Hay arrived. Ferrars had, by Minnie's orders, been lying down all day, so as to be able to sit through dinner, which he accomplished very well. Agnes looking almost pretty, from the happiness of being once more with him she loved so fondly, thanked Minnie, most warmly, for asking her. though, of course, she was quite unaware that anything had been said to Ferrars. The evening passed off very happily and quietly; and Agnes noticed, with trembling joy, a manifest alteration in Ferrars's manner to her. It was no longer as an open, unrestrained friend he addressed her; but with a low, tender intonation which could not be mistaken, and yet which she feared to

believe was intended. Edward, who was wonderfully fidgetty, moving from chair to sofa without any apparent aim, was at last quieted by Minnie going to the piano. And then she sang song after song, while Agnes, in a dream of happiness too deep for words, sat by Ferrars's couch, occasionally glancing at his pale face and his thin white hands, as he lay back with his eyes closed, wearied with the fresh exertions he had made; but with a new and strange sensation of delight, that one sat beside him who loved him with her whole heart.

He would not say anything decided on that first evening. He felt scarcely equal to the excitement, and he thought it better to let Agnes see his change of manner first, and not too hastily; as he fancied she would think they had been telling him, and she had been brought there for the purpose, which he knew would shock her delicate mind. The happy evening, however, ended at last by Minnie saying it was quite time for her invalid to go to bed; and the

long, lingering, pressure of the hand which Agnes received, sent her to bed too happy to sleep.

In the morning, Ferrars sent word to Minnie to know if his kind nurse would allow him to come down to breakfast, as he felt wonderfully better. Of course she consented ; and, as she had her house-keeping duties to perform immediately after, and Edward could not exist without his morning cigar, Agnes and Ferrars found themselves alone for the first time since her arrival. There was silence for a few moments, and then Ferrars said :—

“ Am I looking better than you expected to see me? I have been taken such care of.”

“ You still look very delicate,” answered Agnes, without raising her eyes from some work she was trying to do.

“ I am far from strong, certainly. I am so disappointed my ordination had to be postponed. I hope I shall be strong and well by the next.”

“ I hope so, indeed,” said Agnes.

"I wonder where my first curacy will be. A man ought to love his profession very much when he takes orders; for poor clergymen are very ill paid. There are no curacies on which a man could marry, without private means, at least; and, you know, when I marry I must resign my Fellowship."

Agnes's face felt very hot; but as he paused as if expecting her to answer, she said —

"You must wait till you get a living."

"Before I marry, you mean? Yes. But that might be a long, long time; and during that time of waiting, it would be a very happy thing if I knew that when that living was gained, and I, perhaps, had a pretty parsonage-house, that some one would be ready to come and brighten my home. Shall I ever have that happy knowledge?"

It was becoming almost impossible to answer, Agnes felt; but she was very brave, and so, with an effort she commanded her voice to say:

"Why not you as well as any other man?"

"You are not obliged to finish that work, are you?" he said, taking it from her hands with gentle force, and holding them prisoners in his.

"Agnes, I have had a dream; you will not wake me from it, and say it is not true. A dream — that — that you would wait, and love me while you wait, till I could take you to my home. You have been my true friend for long; say you will be my true wife for ever."

Agnes raised her face, for the first time, and, looking in his, with her eyes full of the passionate love she had so long concealed, said —

"For ever."

Then he took her tenderly in his arms, and murmured words of soft endearment, which sounded so strangely sweet from him; for all the years she had known him she had never heard him use those expressions, which too often become matters of course, but by him would never be

addressed save to the being he loved best on earth; and now to hear him murmuring them to her, seemed almost more happiness than she could bear.

"How blind I have been so long, my darling;" he said, "but I could not believe that any one so good as you could love me. Well, I shall have no secrets to tell you, you will have heard them all."

"Yes, all. But you look so pale," said Agnes, starting, as she saw that the colour seemed to have left even his lips. "Let me get you some wine. Do let me; I have a right now?"

"No, dearest; thank you. I shall soon be all right again, I am not very strong. My kind hostess will soon bring me something. She always comes with egg-sherry or sandwiches and wine at eleven o'clock. She is a perfect nurse."

"That she is. How pleased she will be about—about us," said Agnes.

"She will, I am sure."

"Ought I not to go and speak to her?"

"No, no; I can't spare you yet. I'm so happy; I shall soon get well now. We must both write to Mrs. Crawford, What will she say?"

"Everything that is good and kind, I am sure; she is so good to me."

"And my father must be written to as well; we shall be quite busy."

"What will they say? Oh! I half fear them. No money, nor beauty, nothing to recommend me."

"No, nothing at all;" said Ferrars smiling, and fondly stroking the soft brown head which lay on his shoulder. "But there's no accounting for taste; and they must admit that. I am sure, my own darling, I owe you an apology;" he continued, more seriously; "for my folly with Miss Harrowby. How I could have passed you over for her, I cannot think. But truly, I never dreamed of your loving me. You concealed it very cleverly—very cruelly, I may say."

"Ah! but I shall leave that off now, and quite bore you with my love, now I need not be ashamed to confess it."

"I will give you permission to try to bore me. I remember you once quoting the words, 'Never be ashamed to show how much you love; for it is a woman's glory and a man's salvation.' So, please, you must let me see that you believe this. And now, look here, what do you think of this?" and he took from his pocket-book Miss Harrowby's note.

Agnes read it with astonishment.

"Is it possible she could write that after refusing you? What did you do?"

Ferrars told her his reply.

"Poor girl!" said Agnes. "I heartily pity any one who loves you without return."

"I don't think it will make her heart break, dearest, she is not one of that sort."

At this moment they heard Minnie's voice on the stairs, and Agnes started from her position.

"Don't go, don't go;" he said, detaining her hand.

And the door opening, Minnie entered, bringing, as he had said she would, some refreshment for the invalid.

"You did not get on well at breakfast this morning, so I have brought it earlier;" she said.

"Look here, Mrs. Woodford," said Ferrars, holding up Agnes' little white hand. "Do you know this is mine to keep?"

"It is! Then I heartily congratulate you, Mr. Ferrars; you have a prize, indeed. My Agnes!" continued Minnie, holding out her arms; into which Agnes flew, and there wept out her joy as she had once done her sorrow.

CHAP. XXII.

Minnie's Love.

THE answers to the letters of announcement arrived in due course. Mrs. Crawford's was the most kind: she said she could not wish a happier fate for her dear child; and though she ought, she supposed, to send for her home at once, she could not do so, for she knew she was happy. "I ought, also," the letter went on to say, "to talk about the folly of long engagements, but I really cannot; for, besides thinking them very good things, as the parties then become thoroughly acquainted with one another or heartily sick of one another, which is surely better before than after marriage, I shall have the pleasure of keeping longer near

me the dear face which has always had a smile for me, and the willing hand which has been ever ready to do my bidding."

"She 's a brick!" said Edward, when he heard the letter, "in spite of the turban."

Mr. Ferrars' letter was far more paternal; it spoke of the necessarily long engagement, of the want of means on either side, etc., etc. That, of course, they could not object to the young lady, whom they considered very amiable; and they hoped that on her return she would come at once to receive their welcome as their future daughter-in-law. But he sincerely trusted they would seriously consider their position, and not be in haste to marry on inadequate means: it was not in his power, with so many daughters, to increase his son's allowance; and it was, therefore, impossible they could marry till he had obtained a living.

Agnes only smiled as she read it, and looking up hopefully in Ferrars' face, said,

“What's worth having is worth waiting for.”

Ferrars each day grew stronger and better. Happiness is a wonderful elixir. Of course it was soon all over the village, that Agnes and Mr. Ferrars were engaged, and of course the news reached Miss Harrowby.

“He shall not marry her,” she said, pacing her room with angry, hasty step. “He is not such a fool as that dolt, Minnie; he will believe when his eyes are opened—and they shall be.”

It wanted but a day or two to the termination of Ferrars' visit; he and Agnes were to go home to Moorlands together. He was able to walk about bravely now; and was strolling through the village one afternoon, waiting for Minnie and Agnes, who had gone to see Phoebe Winter after her return home, when he suddenly came upon Miss Harrowby. They had only seen one another at church, or passing in a carriage, since their correspondence. He would

have passed with a mere bow ; but she suddenly stopped him, and, in a trembling, earnest voice, her face flushing and paling by turns, said :

“ Mr. Ferrars, I must say one word. I must ask you to believe that I rejoice in your happiness ; but, oh ! Mr. Ferrars, are you sure it is secure—are you certain you are not lured into a fool’s Paradise ? At the risk of your attributing unworthy motives to my actions, I have sought you to tell you this. I have tried to see you since I first heard of your engagement. Miss Hay has been very much at the Woodfords’, and I have watched her there. I may be mistaken ; only be wary. I must go now. God bless you, Frank !”

She had spoken this all so hastily, and Ferrars was so astonished at her speaking to him at all, that he could not answer her ; and she was gone before he had time to recover himself.

What could she mean ? Agnes deceive him. Edward untrue to his wife—was that what she meant ? Surely the girl was mad. He would

not believe it, or think of it again. But still the words kept recurring to him, "I have watched her at the Woodfords' ;" and he recalled many a long whispered conversation he had himself noticed, and the terms of admiration in which Edward had spoken of her.

Whilst worried and perplexed with these thoughts, Agnes and Minnie joined him ; and in a moment she saw there was something the matter.

She put her arm through his, and said, tenderly :

"Darling, you're tired. We've kept you too long waiting."

"No ; not in the least," he said, endeavouring to recover himself ; and, looking in her bright, honest face, the cloud which had passed between them moved away.

Minnie had never in any way alluded to Miss Harrowby's insinuations respecting Agnes to her or any one, but she had frequently thought of the lines she had sent her, and longed to ask

an explanation. She felt sure that she knew of her love for Ferrars—that they alluded to him, but still she wondered how they came into Miss Harrowby's possession. So that afternoon, as they sat at work, the gentlemen being out driving, and they alone, talking, as usual, of Ferrars, Minnie said:

“Did you ever keep a journal, Agnes?”

“No, never. I could never make my mind up to see any foolish thoughts of mine in black and white.”

“Are you sure you never wrote any thoughts of yours, dear?”

“Why, Minnie; why do you ask so anxiously? Oh! Minnie,” she said, laughing and blushing; “you found that piece of paper.”

“What piece of paper?”

“Why, you know all about it, you saucy puss. The night you dined at Mrs. Crawford's I had made an extract from a book I had been reading, which seemed exactly to express my feelings about Frank and Isabella, and your

carriage drew up as I finished it ; so I pushed it into a book of engravings, and forgot afterwards to remove it. When I looked next morning it was gone. You are the thief, then."

"It was stolen, certainly."

"Ah! I know it was you. I hope you tore it up. I am too happy to care about it now. I was very wretched and absurdly sentimental then."

"Ah! darling, it's all right now, is it not?" said Minnie, delighted that her confidence in her friend had not been misplaced ; and, changing the conversation, that Agnes might ask no further questions, it was not reverted to again. Agnes little thought what those lines might have done—how they had been used as a deadly shaft to wound her friend, but how she, clothed in a wife's best armour, faith and love, had resisted and defied it.

Another day passed tranquilly away, and the next, Agnes and Ferrars took their departure ;

and, he was almost ashamed to own to himself, that he was glad to go. Each time he had seen Edward draw his chair near Agnes, or address her in a low voice, which he frequently did, "I have watched her at the Woodfords," rung painfully on his ear; and it was a real relief to him when, once by his side in the railway carriage, they were whirled rapidly away.

"Minnie," said Edward, a day or two after their departure; "I'll tell you what I've made up my mind to; to take the farm here into my own hands. I know next to nothing about it; but I've been reading the subject up lately, and I'll get a stunning good bailiff, and then I shall get on first-rate; and I shall have something to do. Agnes' last words to me, were, 'Find some employment; you'll be a wiser and a better man;' and so I should—and I should not be half such a bore to you. I should not be always at home, noticing any dusty corners your housemaid may have left, or hearing about

the baby crying. I think it's a first-rate idea ; what do you say?"

" Well, dear, if you think you shouldn't lose money by it: but amateur farming is rather dangerous, isn't it ; if you understand nothing about it, your bailiff may rob you."

" Oh! I daresay he will ; but he'll take very good care nobody else does."

" But, does the man who has it, wish to leave it?"

" Yes, that's just it; he wants a bigger farm."

" Well, darling, I shall like it. I quite agree with dear Agnes, that you would be better if employed ; and, if you think you could manage without losing money, it will be capital."

" I should lose a little at first—but I had a letter from my father, this morning; by-the-bye, I never showed it to you ; here it is! And he says, as you'll see, that my uncle, the old fellow who came from India with a lumping fortune, is dying, they think ; and, as he is

going to leave his money to Fred and me, I shall have some to play ducks and drakes with, without interfering with our present income."

"Very well, dear. I do not pretend to understand it; but I should be glad for you to be amused and employed; and I have been going to say to you, darling, that I will willingly return to London, if you really cannot make yourself happy in the country."

"Oh! no, child; all right. I'm going to turn farmer. I shall propound the matter to Uncle Bellamy, and, if he agrees, put the matter in train."

"And, now, I have something to tell you," said Minnie. "Phœbe is coming back to live with us. Jane is so tiresome, I have given her warning; and pretty Phœbe is going to be nursemaid. I persuaded her, yesterday."

"I'm glad to hear it, I'm sure; it will be a great improvement on that turnip-faced looking animal; and, now, I shall go and smoke a cigar, and meditate on my new occupation."

Phoebe had, as Minnie said, determined to accept the offer of a return to her old place. She had learnt to bear the sight of Robin's wife now, and even calmly to see him. The excitement of his unjust imprisonment had long since died away, and all things in the village had resumed the even tenour of their way. In their own hearts, Robin, Anne, and Phoebe carried this secret, never mentioning it, even amongst themselves ; but their common sorrow had so united the women, that no angry feeling existed between them — and when they met, they spoke kindly to each other.

A few days after Edward's conversation with Minnie, his uncle died, and his father said, he should wish him to come up to town, as there would be a great deal of business to do, and he would like him to remain till after the funeral, and the reading of the will.

Accordingly, he started the next morning, and, to Minnie's great delight, was most considerate about leaving her alone ; and begged

her to have her mother with her during his absence ; and, kissing her very fondly, promised to bring her home something very beautiful, if he had a thumping legacy.

In the meanwhile, everything was going on smoothly and happily at Moorlands. They had all received Agnes kindly. Lucy only had suggested it was a pity, as she was going to be a clergyman's wife, that she had not practised parish work ; and said, she was sure she must regret, now, not having done so.

"Not in the least, dear Lucy," answered Agnes, smiling ; " because I acted by the light given me. I felt my duty was to attend entirely to Mrs. Crawford's comfort ; to be always ready when she wanted me ; and I generally found I had full employment, without undertaking any other."

" Well, but you will find yourself very awkward, and ignorant, when it becomes your duty."

" Very likely ; but my *husband* will teach

me," she said, with a tender emphasis on the word; "and, with such a teacher, I shall be an apt scholar, I dare say."

"I don't think he knows, himself, much about it; it's always been against my wish, his taking orders at all. I think him very unfitted."

"That matter we will not discuss, dear," said Agnes, gravely. "I shall be always most sorry not to agree with any of dear Frank's relations; and, as I shall invariably think him right, I shall never wish to hear anything they may say to the contrary, as I should then be obliged to differ with them."

"Dear me, child; if you are going to make such a god of your husband as that, I think you have a poor chance of happiness. He'll very soon make you a slave."

"Well, I'd rather be his slave than the world's queen, Lucy," said Agnes, with her old gaiety; and so the conversation ended.

One morning, when Ferrars came in to Mrs.

Crawford's, Agnes told him she wanted her to go to town with her on business, and that she had fixed the following day. She feared they might be gone a week. Of course this was a great age to the lovers ; but, as they were more reasonable than most persons under the circumstances, they agreed that it would be a preparation for Frank's departure for his curacy, which might possibly be at some great distance ; and so the next day Frank went with them to the station, and Agnes considered she behaved heroically. Of course they were to write every day, and the first two mornings the letters came all right ; but the third morning no letter came from Agnes. He had only one, which he read twice through, and then placed it in his pocket without comment.

"Is it from Agnes ?" asked Dora. "How is she ?"

"It is not from Agnes," he answered, quietly ; finished his breakfast, discussed the newspaper with his father, and did not leave the table

until they all did; but then he went to his own room, and, locking himself in, again drew forth his letter to read.

" I met Agnes Hay in Brighton, walking
" *alone* with Edward Woodford. Are you aware
" of this? If you are, I have nothing more to
" say.

" Your watchful and true friend,

" I. H."

Certainly, this was strange—in Brighton, when she had said they were going to London. No letter; and Woodford with her! Well, perhaps his wife was there too, walking behind with Mrs. Crawford, and this mischief-maker had not chosen to see them. But, then, why should not Agnes have told him she was going to Brighton?—and she did not seem to mind leaving him, either. What should he do? After some consideration, he determined to go over to Grassdale and see Minnie. The only

difficulty was to frame an excuse to her and to his family. If he went off directly, he could be back at night by the last train, and so he thought he would merely say that he did not know what to do with himself, and that he should take a run on the line somewhere; and to Minnie he would tell the truth. This he no sooner settled in his own mind, than he carried it out, as he did everything, at once; and so, in half an hour's time, he was whirling away in the train to Grassdale.

Greatly was Minnie astonished to see him. She did not notice the ring at the bell, and she was sitting on the floor in the drawing-room with her child, who was most busy pulling her mother's long golden hair all about her face. She jumped up in confusion, blushing and laughing, as the door opened, and Ferrars entered. But she saw in a moment that there was something wrong; and, ringing the bell for Phoebe to take the baby, she sat down to hear all he had to say.

"Edward's in London," she said "he will be so sorry not to see you."

"In London, is he? Are you quite sure of that?"

"Quite sure; yes. Why?" she asked, in amazement.

"I heard he was not. In short, Mrs. Woodford, it is useless beating about the bush. I will speak freely. I am come on purpose to consult with you. Read that!" and he produced Miss Harrowby's letter.

She read it through; and, looking up at him with a bright smile, which seemed almost to restore his confidence, she said:

"This poor girl is certainly mad. You have much to answer for; you have turned her brain, Mr. Ferrars."

"But, Mrs. Woodford, do you not call it strange and mysterious. I did not know Agnes was in Brighton; neither did you know your husband was; and I have had no letter from her this morning.

"Well, Miss Harrowby may be mistaken in their identity,—or uttering a falsehood altogether. Hear me, Mr. Ferrars," and Minnie put her hand kindly on his arm, for she saw, by his pale face, how agitated and distressed he was; "I am not clever—not learned enough in the world's ways, to give you counsel, perhaps; and have no power to convince you, with clever reasoning; but I have a simple code which I follow, that makes me happy and contented. Learn it of me, if you would be so, too. I have implicit, unquestioning faith in my husband. As I am true to him, so I believe he is true to me. I let no one come between us, nor ever will. 'So long as he is kind and loving to me, I ask no questions—I vex myself with no conjectures. I can imagine that he may like and admire what is estimable in another, without the less loving me; and, as 'perfect love casteth out fear,' so do I love my husband, and have no fear. Love and trust Agnes like this, and you will both be happy, as you both deserve to be."

"Dear Mrs. Woodford, you are *very* good," said Ferrars, looking, with admiration, in the beautiful face raised to his; "but, still, what are they both doing at Brighton; and why did not Agnes write to me?"

"She will write to you to-morrow, and explain all. I would as soon doubt an angel as Agnes! Listen; and I will tell you what I have never told her or my husband, because I would not insult either of them, by so doing. I would not name it now, if it were not to comfort you; and I rely on your honour, never to repeat it." She then proceeded to tell him in what manner Miss Harrowby had endeavoured to make her miserable, and how, in the case of the bracelet, she had been proved so wrong.

This certainly had the effect of consoling him a little; but, still he could not but feel it was mysterious, nor be perfectly satisfied till he received an explanation.

Minnie then said he must take some luncheon with her and her mother, and go

off again by the four o'clock train. "And go to bed, and to sleep, to-night," she said, smiling, "in perfect faith that you will have an explanation in the morning."

In a short time, Ferrars found himself seated at lunch with the two ladies, talking and laughing, and having almost forgotten his worry and vexation; so had the influence of this good and guileless being done its work. Minnie, by Ferrars' request, told her mother, that he had come over, just by way of something to do; and so, of course, she asked no further questions.

Ferrars went off by the four o'clock train; and, the next morning, she received a letter from Edward, saying he hoped to be home on the following day, and then he should have a great deal to tell her. The letter was full of the warmest affection, quite a love letter,—and Minnie was perfectly satisfied.

The same post brought a letter from Agnes to Ferrars, from Brighton, dated two days before, and which had been mis-sent, saying

that Mrs. Crawford had found, that a person whom she wanted to see on particular business was at Brighton, with a sick wife, and that she had been obliged to go there to see him ; but they hoped to be home in a day or two. She said she longed to see Frank again : that the time was very heavy ; that each day seemed two ; in short, all that sweet nonsense that we are never tired of hearing, from those we love ; but she did not mention Edward Woodford.

The day Minnie was expecting Edward, she sat watching for him as eagerly and anxiously as in the days of courtship. He told her he should be home about four o'clock ; but it was nearly five, and still he did not come, and she was beginning to be frightened and think something was the matter, when the sound of wheels made her rush to the window ; and there she saw coming into the drive an exquisite little pony-carriage with a pair of grey ponies with the most perfect trappings, and seated in it, her husband. She was soon at the door,

and as soon in his arms, as he flung the reins to his man and jumped out of the carriage.

"I'm late, darling, I know; but I could not get the little brutes out of the horse-box for ever so long. And now, my dear Mrs. Woodford, perhaps you will tell me how you like your new carriage."

"Mine! Edward?"

"Yes, your very own, if you will accept it."

"Oh! mamma, dear mamma! come here, and see what my precious husband has bought me. Look at my darling little carriage. Thank you a thousand times, my Edward; let me pat those sweet ponies;" and she flew out to them, and rubbed and kissed their soft, velvety noses; the ponies seeming quite to relish the attention.

"Please to admire the whip, too," said Edward, handing it to her. It was silver-mounted, with M. W. from E. W., engraved on it.

Edward was perfectly satisfied with the

genuine delight his gift afforded his little wife, and as soon as they entered the house he said,

"Now, I'll tell you all my adventures: in the first place, my trump of an old uncle—by the bye, have you got crape enough?"

"Yes, Edward"; said Minnie, laughing. "Do you mean to measure the crape by the size of the legacy."

"No, no; all right. Well, he's left me £10,000, and the same to poor old Fred, who's perfectly bewildered, and assures me there are four girls he wants to propose to; and he can't make up his mind which will be the best."

"That's so like Fred," said Minnie. "However, I'm glad he has the money, and you too, darling; for now your little hobby about the farm can be carried out. Fancy my having married a London exquisite, and his turning out a country farmer. But now go on with your adventures."

"Well, the second day I was in town, who should I meet in Regent Street, but Agnes

Hay and Mrs. Crawford. Of course she was astonished and delighted, and all that sort of thing, and I must go home and lunch with them. Well, I did; and Mrs. Crawford then asked me if I wanted a pony-carriage and pair of exquisite ponies, as a friend of hers wanted to part with them before leaving England. I was wondering what sort of a present I could bring you back, and I said that sounded just the sort of thing; but as the sum required was rather a round one, of course I would 'nt buy it without seeing it. 'Well, she said, but it's at Brighton, we go there to-morrow; will you come with us?' So I told her I could not leave town till after the old gentleman's funeral; but I 'd run down the next day (that accounted for my staying another day, you know). So I went down by the first train in the morning; saw the trap, and was charmed; pictured to myself my sweet little wife driving about in it; bought it on the spot, and carried the whole concern off with me in the evening.

Of course I dined with Mrs. Crawford and Agnes, and we went and swelled about on the Marine Parade a bit ; and, in short, I had a very jolly day. Agnes was in the most perfect delight about the pony-chaise ; for she knew it was the very thing you would like. And, indeed, I don't believe she would have let me come away from Brighton without buying it. The poor woman it belonged to, is in a consumption, and her husband is going to take her to Madeira. What do you keep smiling at, and looking so wicked for ? ”

“ Nothing ; only I'm very happy.”

“ You 've taken out a new lease since you 've lived in the country. You're always happy now, ar'nt you, little woman ? ”

“ I always ought to be. I should be very ungrateful if I were not, with the best of mothers, the best of husbands, and the best of children. Is it not so, mamma, dear ? ”

“ I think so, my darling ; and am glad you appreciate it. And now I shall leave you with

that 'best of husbands,' and go and look after my own little household matters; my poor old Jane will think I have been away an age. Good bye, child, I leave you quite satisfied now."

"Yes, dear mother," said Minnie, laughing. "I don't think we shall quarrel before to-morrow."

As soon as her mother was gone, Minnie went to her husband; and kneeling down by him, said,

"I am going to tell you something now which will quite astonish you. Ferrars was here yesterday."

"Ferrars! What upon earth brought him?" exclaimed Edward with astonishment.

"Well, a strange thing. Miss Harrowby wrote to him, to say you were seen walking about with Agnes at Brighton. By some mischance he had had no letter from her, and did not know she was at Brighton; neither did I know you were, and so the matter seemed to him most mysterious."

"Why, what a fool the girl is!" said Edward, angrily. "Mrs. Crawford was on one of the seats, tired with walking up and down. What a horrid nuisance! I suppose Ferrars was in an awful way then, coming down here about it."

"Yes, he was rather silly."

"And you—you—Minnie, darling, were you unhappy about it?" said Edward, tenderly.

"Not in the very least, dearest. It has all happened much as I thought; and I dare say Agnes has written to Ferrars, and satisfied him by this time."

"I hope so. I shall write to him to-night, Minnie. I'm very vexed, indeed; more vexed than I can tell you. I should scarcely have thought Ferrars would have been silly enough to be jealous, either. I never saw the girl. Did you know Miss Harrowby was at Brighton?"

"No. I knew she was not at home. But now, my husband, smooth away all those

wrinkles;" she said, rising and placing her hand on his forehead. "And don't look worried any more; there is no harm done here, and I trust not at Moorlands; though I hoped to have heard from Ferrars to say all was explained."

"I can't help feeling worried. Good Heavens, what mischief she might have done! My darling Minnie!" and taking her head between his hands he kissed her again and again.

Immediately after dinner, he wrote Ferrars a long letter. And then Minnie, seeing he still looked worried, took a book and sat down at his knee and read to him; for although not a great reader himself, he enjoyed a good novel read out to him; and so the evening passed quietly away.

CHAP. XXIII.

A Fire.

"THAT creature's come home," said Edward, the next morning; "I've just met her."

"What creature, love?" asked Minnie.

"Oh! that Miss Harrowby. I hate the very sight of her."

"Oh! nonsense, darling; she's not worth the exertion of hating. You're going to drive me out this morning, are you not, with my beautiful ponies?"

"I am at your service, when you like."

"Well, then, immediately after lunch."

"All right. I'll smoke a cigar, now, to soothe my troubled feelings, after seeing that girl."

Ferrars was not in nearly so happy a state of

mind as good little Minnie; for he had not been satisfied with Agnes' letter, full of love as it was, because she had never named Edward. And so, in his reply, he made a point of saying the most cutting thing he could in reference to it, which had the agreeable effect of making poor Agnes cry all day; for, with all her wisdom, she was not proof against that great relief to a woman's wounded feelings,—a good cry; and she did think Frank was unjust. It had never occurred to her to mention Edward's visit, as it neither concerned him nor her. Ferrars, the moment he had written the letter, entirely recovered his annoyance. He had driven out the sting; and he now only longed to see Agnes, and tell her all was well again. He smiled when he got her sad reproachful letter. She was to be home the next day; and he knew so well his power over her, that he was certain she would at once forgive him.

The evening after Edward's return home,

Minnie was singing to him, and he was lounging on the sofa, when the awful cry of "Fire!" startled the quiet village. Edward sprang up and listened—it was repeated, and then Minnie, with a face white with terror, sprung to him,

"Oh! Edward, dearest, what is it?"

"Fire somewhere, darling. I must go"; and, calling to his man servant to follow him, he ran out of the house.

Minnie flew up stairs to her nursery. Phœbe had heard the cry, and was looking out of window eagerly.

"Oh! Ma'am, where is it?" she said, as her mistress entered.

"I don't know, Phœbe. Your master's gone; but I think, if I stay with baby, you might run and see if mamma's cottage is safe, and where it is."

"Oh! yes, Ma'am, that I will;" and, staying for no bonnet or shawl, Phœbe rushed out.

From the window Minnie could see the awful red glare above the houses, and hear the shouts,

and the people running, and the eager questions as to where it was ; and it seemed ages to her till Phœbe came back, breathless, to say it was at Mr. Harrowby's ; that it was a fearful sight to see ; flames were rushing out of the windows ; and every one said, nothing could save the house, there was so little water to be got ; nothing could be done more, by them, but to wait the result.

Minnie and Phœbe, and the two other servants, stood watching at the nursery window, thinking one moment the flames were extinguished, and the next, shuddering to see them blaze up again. After an hour, which seemed two to the anxious watchers, Edward returned, quite exhausted, and blackened with smoke. He said they had saved all the lives, but the house must go ; there was no help for it.

"Minnie," he said, "I saved her life ; her's, who would have darkened mine."

"Thank God for that, dear Edward ; is she hurt?"

"Yes, I think she is. In her room the fire commenced; and she had locked the door, and could not open it. She would not jump out of window, though we had beds, and everything placed for her—she only stood there. We could see her distinctly, in the glare of the fire; her hands clasped over her face, like a statue. At length I got a ladder, and, putting it against the window, sprung up to get her down; but it was a fearful job, Minnie. My sweet wife, I thought I should never see you and our child again; the flames licked round the rings of the ladder, and, in her terror, she clung so to me, that it needed almost superhuman strength to guide her safely down. But, thank God, I managed it; and the cheers of the people, as I safely landed her, I fancy I can hear now. Oh! Minnie, darling, I feel quite beat."

Minnie could not speak for tears; she could only cling round his neck, and kiss his forehead; and, in her heart, bless God that he was safe, and had saved another.

"And, now, let's to bed, darling; the Harrowbys are all at the Vicarage."

He stopped at the nursery door, and said :

"Shall I wake the child, if I kiss her?"

"No, dearest, I am sure you won't."

He went in softly, and, bending over his child's cot, kissed it tenderly.

The first thing in the morning, before they had quite finished breakfast, young Harrowby called, to express his own and his friends' thanks for Edward's gallantry; and to say that Isabella was much hurt, and very ill with the excitement; but that she could not rest till she had seen Edward; and she seemed so excited about it, that the doctor thought it advisable he should see her as soon as possible.

Accordingly he started with young Harrowby; and Minnie went to her mother's, to see how she was after the alarm. He was long before he returned; and when he did, Minnie was astonished at his pale, grave face. Never since she had known him, had he looked as then.

He sat down for a moment, without speaking, and then he said :

“ Minnie, I scarcely know what to say to you. I have heard a strange confession to-day.”

“ What, dear Edward ?” she asked, seeing he appeared to wait for an answer.

“ Minnie, you have been one in a thousand ; never shall I be able to repay you, for all you have been to me. You have trusted me when no other would. Come here, darling,” drawing her nearer to him ; “ let me talk to you. That unfortunate girl has told me all—told me how her love for Ferrars led her to try and undermine your peace. She hated Agnes, and wished to make you do so. Now, in her penitence and grief, she has told me all ; and how like an angel you behaved throughout. And, Minnie, only fancy, she was locked in her room, meditating some further vengeance, when a spark from her candle flew amongst some muslin or something on the table. Does it not

seem like a judgment on her, poor thing? She is badly burnt ; her beautiful face ruined for ever I think ; one can only pity her. Thanks to your angel nature, I can do so ; but, if she had estranged my wife's love, I tremble to think how I should have hated her."

" Dearest Edward, it would take a stronger than her to do that ; poor thing, she is indeed an object for our tenderest pity."

" But now, Minnie, I have not quite finished all I would say. I want to tell you all you have done for me. As you have often heard me say, I admire and esteem Agnes beyond expression. She has exercised a strange and powerful influence over me—I hope, to some good purpose ; but had you not been so loving, so trusting, I might have become estranged from you, as that wretched girl would have made you believe ; but your ever-ready smile, your beautiful unquestioning trust in me, has kept me true as steel to you. I married you because you were a pretty girl, and I wanted a wife and a com-

fortable home; but I value and treasure you now as the companion who will, by God's blessing, lead me through the strait path here to that bright home above, which we will pray to share. God bless my Minnie, and repay her for her Love!"

CHAP. XXIV.

Conclusion.

MANY, many years have passed away ; and at the village of Grassdale we will take a farewell peep, before I close my history. Whether it has a moral or not, I will leave to those who read it.

It is Christmas time. There is a happy party assembled in a cottage there, which has had another wing built to it ; for the family have grown too big for its former accommodation.

Agnes and her husband, with several olive branches, are there to make merry ; and sweet Minnie, the long golden ringlets braided away under a matronly cap, now gives a joyous welcome to her guests, and loves to see her darlings at play with Agnes's. In one corner of the

room, sitting silently, but with a pleasant smile upon her lips, is one you will not recognise ; for her once resplendent beauty is gone, and a fearful scar marks her face, and her black hair is grey now. But better than the lost beauty is the expression of gentle sympathy, of interest in and for others, which now characterises her. Isabella Harrowby, for some years after the fire, left Grassdale, and lived abroad with some friends ; but she had just returned, and the two women, whom she had tried to injure, both said :

“ It is Christmas time. A time to forgive, to forget all injuries. Let us ask her here to join our party.”

They did. Little was said on either side ; but both shook her warmly by the hand, and bade her welcome.

A little further down the village street, you must follow me before we part company. Into the churchyard first, there is a grave there, with this inscription on its head-stone :

Sacred to the Memory
OF
ANNE DALE,
THE WIFE OF ROBIN DALE,
OF THIS PARISH,
Aged 50.

In the church is a small painted window, and written beneath, "In memory of Eleanor Foster: a testimony of love from her daughter Minnie Woodford."

Now into one cottage, a little beyond the church, with its comfortable kitchen, with its logs blazing on the hearth, where beside it sits our old friend Robin Dale, and, with her hand in his—Phœbe, his now happy wife. Poor Anne had died in Phœbe's arms of a fever, through which she had nursed her when no one else would; and with her last dying effort, she had taken her gentle nurse's hand and laid it in Robin's, whispering, with her failing breath, "It is my last request," so now through that jasmine-covered window Phœbe gazed at last

the happy little mistress of it all. And now Robin never wanders lonely in his garden ; but her arm is linked in his, to cheer and solace his declining years. His head is white as snow, and streaks of silver glisten amongst Phoebe's hair, too. They laughed in the village at their marriage, and called them "the old couple;" but they cared not. The dream of Phoebe's life was accomplished—she was Robin's wife.

Perhaps some, as they read this, may cast it aside, and say, "Ah ! such things only happen in books : it is not natural." Let them seek through the world for a love as faithful, as unselfish as Phoebe's, as pure and trusting as Minnie's, and they will find, that, even here, it has not gone unrewarded.

THE END.

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